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ABSTRACT

This report highlights results from the 1999 Wingspread Conference on improving student achievement, a gathering of educators, leaders, and policymakers that opened a dialogue about barriers to full implementation of high standards for all students. Participants discussed five papers that examined these issues from top to bottom--from the perspective of the federal government to that of a school principal. They touched on such subjects as: leadership and the human dimension of reform; the crucial importance of school climate, instruction, and leadership; promoting student achievement at the district level; challenges that lie ahead; and state policy and its implications (diversity, urban needs, politics, and accountability). Participants noted the need to help every student reach high standards, improve educator capacity, enhance accountability and assessment systems, and work on public will and community engagement. The conference papers included in this report are: "Standards-Based Reform and Changing the Metaphor of School: The Principal's Perspective" (Tom Welch); "Challenges of Improving Instruction: A View from the Classroom" (Deborah Loewenberg Ball and David K. Cohen); "Finishing the Race: A District Perspective of Standards-Based Reform" (Vicki L. Phillips); "Looking Back at a Decade of Reform: The Maryland Standards Story" (Nancy S. Grasmick); and "Implementing Standards-Based Reform: Challenges for State Policy" (Margaret E. Goertz). (SM)

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Closing the Gap

A Report on the Wingspread Conference
Beyond the Standards Horse Race:
Implementation, Assessment, and Accountability –
The Keys to Improving Student Achievement

Sponsored by the
Council for Basic Education
and
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BASIC EDUCATION

Special Report
February 2000

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Edited by

Terri Duggan and Madelyn Holmes

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Washington, D.C.
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PREFACE

This is a not the typical report on yet another rhetorical conference.

During the past decade, indeed, for the past century, the move to adopt and implement academic standards for what students should know and be able to do has been the most important force in improving education in the United States.

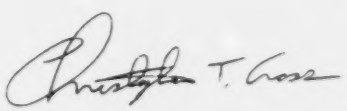
Sadly, in the past year the opposition to this reform has begun to gain ground as parents, teachers, and students began to realize that this is hard work and that there are real consequences for failure to perform.

Because CBE is passionately committed to raising the standards for what students learn in the public schools, we created a conference, in collaboration with the Johnson Foundation, that focused on what barriers exist in the implementation of standards and how they can be overcome. We also made the very conscious decision to focus on implementation, not policy, and to include a healthy number of school-level people – teachers and principals.

In this special report, we have tried to highlight not only the results of the intensive two and a half-day discussions but to present, as well, the flavor of the conference. In the write-up of the proceedings, we have identified points that everyone more or less agreed upon and the "troubling clouds" that overshadow implementation of standards in every classroom in the United States. A one-page list of conference findings, "Putting It All Together," summarizes the outcomes of this very fruitful gathering that took place in the beautiful Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin, from November 2 to 4, 1999. We include the five conference papers, written by a principal, district superintendent of schools, state superintendent, and two university-based researchers.

This conference would not have happened without the tremendous support of the Johnson Foundation with Carole M. Johnson, program director, and Wendy Butler, conference support specialist. The standards team at CBE, headed by Kaye Forgione and including Ilene Berman, Terri Duggan, Linda Plattner, and Stephanie Soper; Madelyn Holmes, director of publications; and Julie Brès Slavik, director of development, all worked heroically to ensure a successful conference.

We are grateful for the financial support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Spencer Foundation, and for the active participation of the 45 educators, policymakers, foundation associates, and press representatives whose efforts made this Wingspread Conference an historic event for the Council for Basic Education.



Christopher T. Cross
President

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At this unique gathering of educators, leaders, and policymakers, CBE and The Johnson Foundation endeavored to open a dialogue about the barriers to full implementation of high standards for what students should know and be able to do. What, we asked, are the biggest challenges the standards movement currently faces? How can we overcome those challenges to make a difference in the education of our children?

To examine these issues, the first conversation was a look at standards thus far from "top to bottom" – from the perspective of the federal government to that of a school principal. While it is clear that the belief in standards as a catalyst for change is strong at every level, "troubling clouds," as Judith Johnson of the U.S. Department of Education put it, remain. The discussions over the next two days began with the classroom and worked up to the state and federal policy levels to reflect the "bottom-up" nature of school change. Large group discussions alternated with smaller group conversations to provide a more in-depth discourse. Yet, the challenges the participants discussed were not limited to just one level of the school system – they are issues that everyone will have to deal with, from the individual classroom teacher to policymakers at the state and federal level.

Barriers to Success

What are the barriers to full-fledged, standards-driven reform? There are many. The most public is the issue of **high-stakes, state-level standardized tests** that are being implemented in many states to measure student achievement of the standards. While it is wise to have assessments that are linked to standards, rather than holding students accountable for achievement on some off-the-shelf, norm-referenced test that has little to do with the standards, some critics claim the tests are too difficult, that they are dumbed-down, or that they are unfair. Another problem is ensuring that students have actually been adequately taught what the district/state is [illegible]g them on.

A further barrier is the **lack of coherent professional development** to give teachers the capacity to teach to new higher standards. Many states admit they have not been able to provide the resources their teaching staffs need to provide adequate learning opportunities for their students. Similarly, principals often lack the training or development on how to truly be instructional leaders that can turn schools around.

Leadership overall is another worrisome issue. Anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that what really brings about positive school change is the presence of a strong instructional leader – at the classroom, school, and district level. Yet, **there do not appear to be enough new leaders** stepping up to the challenge of change. Where can we find these leaders and how can we get them into the school system?

A further challenge is **equity. How do we ensure that all students can meet these high standards?** Questions about the resources certain groups of children are less likely to have – a qualified teacher, adequate materials, extra help – are worrisome to those who envisioned standards as a way to get past the excuses we make for the fact that our poor and minority children are so much more likely to get a sub-par educational experience. There is also great concern about how to make sure that students with disabilities or students who are learning English are included in new systems of higher expectations.

Finally, it is clear that educators and policymakers have a challenge in continuing to **maintain the public's trust.** New, more difficult tests, the use of disaggregated data, and the frequently confusing messages the public hears from the school system are whittling away at the public's faith in school reform. Additionally, schools have a continual challenge in getting parents involved – something that can have such a positive effect on a school, but that is often so elusive.

What Do We Do? Meeting the Challenges

The participants discussed papers th. t dealt with these questions at all levels of the school system. They discussed these issues in large and small groups. They asked hard questions and spoke candidly about the answers. In the end, they affirmed their belief in high standards for every student and in the power and potential of standards-driven reform to make a difference. But, they agreed, there is much to be done to meet these challenges and to take standards-driven reform to the next level. On a macro level, all educators and leaders should consider how to move from a compliance model to a support model and make widespread concerted efforts to share and replicate successful ideas and initiatives. Beyond that, the next steps fell into four categories:

- **Helping Every Student Reach High Standards**
- **Improving Educator Capacity**
- **Accountability and Assessment Systems**
- **Public Will/Community Engagement**

First, **steps need to be taken to help every student reach high standards**. This includes making sure that the best teachers are with the students who need them most; providing other resources (more time, different instructional strategies, research-based programs) to students who are falling behind; continually revisiting, revising, and prioritizing standards; and diagnosing students continuously, rather than just putting them in summer school at the end of the year.

Second, **professional development needs to be improved to further develop the educators we need in our classrooms, schools, and in leadership positions**. This means giving teachers and principals the opportunity to work together, network, look at student work, and learn from each other. It means giving them the training they need to fully implement the many policies of standards-driven reform. There are standards for high-quality professional development, and yet much money is squandered every year on one-shot workshops that have little effect on instruction.

Third, **accountability and assessment systems need to be better aligned with the goals of the standards movement**. This means going beyond one high-stakes test as the only measure of student performance and accountability. Systems need to have multiple and aligned measures of student performance. Further, accountability systems need to apply to *everyone* and every level. Is the state providing adequate resources and information? What about the district, the school, the teacher? Are all doing their part to ensure student learning? Only then can we truly hold anyone accountable for school or student performance.

Finally, **there is much to be done in working with parents and the public**. Schools need to constantly invite and constantly inform parents, and they need to find ways for parents to participate. The district and the state (and this includes boards), first, need to work together to make sure the public hears one cohesive – and candid – message. Then, they need to do everything to get that message out. This is particularly true in dealing with test results and data.

We know what we need to do. Everyone who deals with education – from all levels of government, to the foundations that provide valuable resources, to the independent policy voices, to every local and state board of education, every county office, every district, every community, and every school – needs to take action to make standards-driven reform make a difference for every student. We've developed standards, analyzed them, rated them, and debated them. The bar has been raised. Now it's time to do everything we can to get every student over it.

PROCEEDINGS

The first evening: Leadership and the human dimension of reform

The conference opened with a top-to-bottom look at the challenges, the promise, and the impact of standards at every level from federal to local. First, Judith Johnson, Acting Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education, discussed several challenges she sees ahead for the standards movement, both from her perspective as an assistant superintendent in White Plains, New York, and through her lens as a federal policymaker. These six "troubling clouds" outlined many of the issues that states, districts, and schools are likely to face as well as helped guide the early discussions, as did the insights of Marcia Haskin, who spoke next.

Six Troubling Clouds

1. Assessing all students. How do we solve the problem of using standardized tests that don't reflect local differences? We also need to move to performance-based assessments and away from retention – in a smart way.
2. What does it mean to meet the standard? Particularly, using new performance assessments without retreating to the bell curve.
3. What are we doing to provide appropriate professional development? "If we do not figure out how to bring professional development into the picture in a very comprehensive way, this movement could fail us," she warned.
4. What does it mean to align an assessment to standards? We're still struggling with this notion.
5. The notion of "all children." How do we include English language learners and students with disabilities in our assessment systems? "We have not figured out how to build an inclusive assessment system."
6. The issue of public engagement. We have an increasingly impatient public, since "we've been at this for a long time." And, Johnson noted, we don't always respond to that impatient public appropriately.

What we are beginning to see...is a singular focus on testing, and there's a backlash that's occurring as a result of that.

Haskin, a middle school principal in Los Angeles, offered a more local perspective on the impact of standards. She described how through standards-driven reform, the use of data, teamwork, and leadership, she had been able to transform her middle school and greatly improve the performance of its students. She emphasized the importance of strong and informed leadership and of engaging parents and the community. Additionally, she provided insight into how she saw her role as principal – as an instructional leader, someone who creates a culture in a school, someone who must know and understand the standards inside and out. "I believe firmly," she said, "that the principal is the number one instructional leader in the school and sets not only the academic tone, but also the culture."

Haskin's comments illuminated another "troubling cloud" – the crisis in leadership in schools. "I have a thorough understanding of what standards-based instruction is," she told the group, but what about principals who do not?

Bancroft Middle School **Los Angeles, California**

Bancroft Middle School is located in Hollywood and has a lower-middle class, diverse (and predominantly Latino) population. Like many schools in Los Angeles, Bancroft struggled with literacy, low test scores, and emergency credentialed teachers. But when the Los Angeles district initiated a standards-based instruction process, things began to change.

Marcia Haskin was assistant principal for curriculum and instruction when she began a staff development program that embraced the new Los Angeles standards as well as considered the implications of the Stanford 9 testing used by the district. At the beginning of the school year, teachers used individual student test score data to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of students and plan for the year. Further, each department worked to develop Standards-Based Instruction Models, a system developed by the district that helped teachers align lesson plans to the standards and, at Bancroft, to the skills tested by the Stanford 9. These models were presented to and shared with the whole staff.

Additionally, Haskin and the rest of the administrators became very involved in instruction through frequent formal and informal classroom visits. By the end of three years of implementation, Haskin said, "every student in every class could tell you what standard they were working on."

The standards-based approach really worked at Bancroft. "I've been in the district for more than thirty years," Haskin said, "and the one thing that I have ever felt worked in the district has been standards."

Bancroft also initiated a test preparation program, with practice tests, for the Stanford 9. As a result, student test scores took a "Herculean leap." Bancroft improved more than any other middle school in Los Angeles Unified, and was fifth in the state in language arts and seventh in the state in math for improved test scores. Even more important, Haskin adds, was the fact that the school created a culture of success, of embracing standards, of preparing for testing, and of high expectations.

How can anyone make sure that each school has a qualified instructional leader? This topic caught the attention of the group, who agreed it counted as another "troubling cloud."

The importance of leadership

Christopher Cross, president of CBE, closed the session by highlighting the human dimension of reform, a theme that would surface again many times. The ways that individual leaders set goals, raise expectations, change the cultures of their organizations, and reach out to and include members of the community are unique. Few reforms seem able to succeed without these individual leaders. Perplexingly, though, these very individual components of successful change make replication of successful programs difficult. Schools, districts, and states are all facing the question of and will continue to consider the role of individual leadership as they develop policies for systemwide change.

Day 2, morning: The crucial importance of school climate, instruction, and leadership

The next morning of the conference focused on the school building level – specifically, the classroom and the principal – and the impacts of standards, assessment, and accountability there. The session featured a paper by Tom Welch, a principal from Kentucky, and a paper by Deborah Ball, a researcher from the University of Michigan whose work focused on the complexities of classroom instruction and the interaction between teachers, students, and content.

Norm Higgins, a superintendent from Maine, presented highlights from the papers. Before becoming superintendent of schools in Guilford, Maine, Higgins had shown his own leadership in the rural high school in Guilford, where he was principal. Through standards-driven reform, Higgins' school improved from almost last to number five in the state on the state assessment – with the second lowest per pupil expenditure in the state. Welch's paper, Higgins began, discussed the challenges of creating and running a school that was not only standards-based but student-centered. "Through the individual leadership that Tom provided in his school, he had been able to create a climate where his

vision could flourish," Higgins stated. This brought up the question of how principal leadership can be supported. "How," Higgins asked the group, "do you reach the critical mass where the climate and the expectations in a school can change?" It was clear from Welch's paper and the panel discussion that followed that school climate as well as leadership are essential for school reform.

Ball's paper, Higgins continued, discussed the challenges of improving instruction, which must be considered in a discussion of raising standards for student achievement. New higher expectations, her paper explains, mean that teachers must create practices that are more varied and more complex than ever before. Ball also presented a video of a classroom that brought home the idea that it's not so much what is being taught, but what the teacher is doing to cause learning to happen. Teachers need to get the training to develop these complex practices – which has important policy implications for educators at every level.

A panel discussion followed. One highlight was Kim Sanders' description of what can happen when strong leadership creates a climate of high expectations. At Mission Junior High School in Mission, Texas, (MJHS) where she is a social studies teacher and team leader, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) has been utilized as a diagnostic tool. Students are tested with TAAS-based assessments every six to nine weeks. Additionally, collaboration between teachers and between disciplines has resulted in a coherent, complete curriculum – so complete, Sanders said, that "the school could function without textbooks or dittos." Her story illustrated the value of using data to drive instruction and teacher collaboration. MJHS, the group agreed, provides an example of how to create a climate of success.

Mission Junior High School — **Mission, Texas**

Located at the southern tip of Texas, just across the border from Mexico, Mission Junior High School experiences many of the challenges of today's schools. A high poverty level (80%) and a large Latino population (98%) are the norm here. When Mona Parras became principal, she says, "two of the biggest challenges were low teacher morale and a negative school climate." But under her leadership, this school sets high expectations for its students – and the students rise to the challenge.

At Mission, the focus is on data. Teachers are given extensive training on how to use data in their classrooms. Every six to nine weeks students participate in assessments based on the TAAS – Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. Student-level data is returned within two days, and identifies which students are having difficulty. These students receive interventions ranging from a mandatory tenth period, tutoring, computer-assisted instruction, or mentoring.

But this is not a school focused solely on the TAAS. "TAAS is just the main ingredient of the recipe," says Parras. "We concentrate on the extra ingredients." Teachers use meticulously prepared curriculum based on state standards. Teachers work closely together on curriculum – across and within grade levels and subjects. As a result, the curriculum flows from subject to subject and grade to grade. There is also a strong focus on interdisciplinary lessons, hands-on activities, and instructional field trips to ensure a well-rounded learning experience.

The results for the students have been impressive. All groups of students have improved their TAAS scores over time, and the numbers of migrant, English language learners, and at-risk students passing have each more than doubled in the last five years. Schoolwide, the pass rate has improved from 73 to 89 percent since 1994. More students are taking algebra and other advanced courses as well.

The final ingredient in this successful school is parents. "We continuously inform, and we constantly invite our parents into the school," says Parras. "Bottom line," she says, "is that we love our parents and they love us." The result is a school that truly functions as a learning community. "Our children are our most valuable treasures," says Parras, "and we want them to be joyous when attending our school."

Warren Chapman of the Joyce Foundation provided another insight into the value of climate and culture in a school. "Can you tell," he asked, "when you walk into a school, what the shared goals are?" Shared goals, he asserted, create

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a climate for success. Chapman also spoke eloquently of the important fact that reform is not one-size-fits-all – no two schools or classrooms are alike.

Finally, Welch summed up the discussion by emphasizing the importance of the leadership of passionate, talented people – at every level. It is clear that schools, states, and districts will have to look at how policies can create an environment that fosters leadership.

Overall, the discussion highlighted the importance of two critical, yet often elusive factors in school reform – school climate and leadership – and the participants split into small groups to talk about how these factors affect our ideas about the policies surrounding standards, assessment, and accountability. Each group ended up spending a good amount of time discussing different successful strategies: for teaching to high standards, for helping teachers develop the new and complex practices discussed in Ball's paper, for community engagement, and for developing leadership in schools.

Vicki Phillips, Superintendent — Lancaster, Pennsylvania

When she saw the ad in *Education Week* that called for a "person of consequence," a "master of implementation," who was willing to "be truly innovative," Vicki Phillips knew she had found the right place to be a superintendent. Lancaster, Pennsylvania, was an ethnically diverse community with a dynamic reform plan for its schools. However, the implementation strategies for that plan were so rigid that the district was losing teacher and community support. By constantly asking, "what do we need to do more of, better, or differently in order to realize our vision?" Phillips and her staff began to develop ways to adjust implementation strategies and increase public support.

- Utilized the National Center for Education and the Economy's New Standards Performance Standards, which were similar to Lancaster's in content but far more clear.
- Created a data-driven culture based on multiple pieces of information: results by student, classroom, and school; changes over time; hard and soft indicators.
- Provided early and extended learning opportunities, including a full-day kindergarten, a citywide early literacy campaign, teacher training to improve K-3 skills, and extended learning time after school and during the summer for at-risk students.
- Brought in the Education Trust's Standards in Practice model to train teachers to analyze student work.
- Designed content institutes for teachers to improve their understanding of their subject areas.
- Changed the Office of Curriculum Support into a more support- and service-focused Office of Teaching and Learning.

These are just some of the strategies Phillips used to move her district onto the right track. The community has given her its support and the staff is more energized than ever. When the governor tried to declare Lancaster a "distressed district," the community stayed his decision by pointing out the district's strategic plan and high level of support from the community. Phillips is well on her way to showing the city of Lancaster what a "master of implementation" looks like.

Day 2, afternoon: Promoting student achievement at the district level

After the small group sessions, the whole group turned to the district's role in implementing reform. Judy Seal of the Long Beach Education Partnership (California) worked with Vicki Phillips, superintendent of the School District of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to present Phillips' paper. Phillips' primary point was the importance of "essential supports" that need to be in place for standards and high expectations to work. These supports include:

- inclusive, informed decision-making,
- ongoing, high-quality learning opportunities for staff,
- early and extended learning opportunities for students,
- community engagement,
- artful use of time, technology, and resources,
- safe, personalized learning environments, and
- attention to the human dimension of reform.

The specific implementation of such supports will be different for every learning community, Phillips maintained, but standards cannot succeed without them.

The presentation by Seal and Phillips provided ample fodder for the panelists. First, Joe Villani of the National School Boards Association

reflected further on the importance of public will and support. The school board, Villani asserted, would need to become the liaison between the public and the schools. Additionally, the school board has the power to bring about a focus on student achievement – essentially creating a districtwide culture such as the one Phillips strove to create in Lancaster. Like all stakeholders and players in the local education system, it was clear that school boards needed to take on leadership in the areas of public support and supporting a culture of achievement.

Bella Rosenberg of the American Federation of Teachers offered a word of caution to districts: while standards have helped bring an increased focus on academics, the test frequently becomes the standard. These high-stakes tests also tend to confuse and penalize teachers, she added. The next panelist, Mona Parras, addressed some of the lingering questions about testing, such as those raised by Rosenberg. Parras, principal of Mission Junior High in Mission, Texas, discussed the role of standards and testing in her largely Hispanic district near the Texas border. Through the use of data from the state testing program, Mission Junior High has been able to close some of the achievement gap that leaves behind at-risk students, many of whom are poor or have limited English skills. As Kim Sanders had discussed earlier, Mission Junior High had empowered its teachers to avoid the pitfalls raised by Rosenberg and had also succeeded in securing support from its parents and community. "I think Mona represented what's possible when you have high expectations and proper support," Mary Anne Schmitt of New American Schools said later.

The district can support reform by providing resources such as training on how to use data and assessment and information about using research-based strategies.

Finally, Joe Conaty of the U.S. Department of Education spoke of a more recent development in the district's role in reform. Districts, he said, now have incentives to bring in research-based instructional strategies through the Obey-Porter legislation on comprehensive school reform. This, he felt, would have a whole-district impact on improving instructional strategies.

How to Foster Leadership

Phillips also pointed out that "leadership comes from everywhere." Ultimately, the groups and participants concluded from their discussions about both schools and districts that the way to foster leadership in teachers, principals, and others is to encourage and provide opportunities for collaboration – to let educators work together and give them the chance to develop their leadership skills. How to encourage teachers to develop the kinds of skills illuminated by Ball's paper? Ultimately, it comes from teachers networking, collaborating, and working together to discuss their teaching. How to encourage leadership in principals? By creating conditions where principals can work together and learn from each other. Leadership can be nurtured through professional development – but not professional development as it is frequently done. It takes a more advanced kind of professional development – the kind that involves educators working together, focusing on content and standards, and focusing on instruction.

Q. How can we foster leadership?
A. Through more collaborative professional development and by giving principals and teachers the opportunities to work together and learn from each other.

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The small groups then dispersed to continue their conversations on standards in light of the discussion about the district and reform. The conversations were varied – one group focused on the need to identify and share good practices, good ideas, and successful policies; another focused on brainstorming successful district strategies for professional development and community engagement. Others focused on the ways districts can provide the essential supports to standards-driven initiatives.

Day 2, evening: What we know, where we need to go: The challenges that lie ahead

In the evening session, the group took the time to reflect on what had already been discussed and where the conversation still needed to go. Participants affirmed that:

There is a consensus around high standards, but the movement is at a critical crossroads.

- There was, in the group, a broad-based consensus around high standards for every child.
- However, the standards movement, it was clear, is at a critical crossroads.
- Educators and policymakers still have much work ahead of them, and that falls into several areas:

CHALLENGES:

Raising educator capacity

1. *The "hows" of implementation, specifically related to educator capacity.* As Jan Robinson, a teacher and instructional specialist from School District 21 (outside Chicago), said, "we need to focus on the staff development." What do we need to do to help teachers develop complex practices? "Everyone," she said, "needs to be a coach and a mentor in our system." Further, how do we train people, asked Schmitt, to "look at data, understand data, be strategic around the use of data?" She also asked, "how do we operationalize the professional networks teachers and principals need" to develop capacity for school reform?

Dealing with the complexities of accountability and assessment

2. *The complexities of accountability and assessment.* What system of accountability will best achieve the goals of the standards movement? How can we develop a system that holds the state, district, school, and teacher accountable for providing the solid education, as well as holding the student, teacher, school, and district accountable for high academic achievement? Further, Amanda Broun of the Public Education Network asked how can we resolve the conflicts between local and state standards, for example, or local and state assessments. And how should those assessments be used, given that currently many of the consequences of assessment are creating a backlash?

Getting the public on board

3. *The importance of public engagement.* If we don't continue to bridge the gap between standards and instruction and show the public the impact standards can have, "people are going to lose faith," said Schmitt. Having heard from educators such as Mona Parras and Vicki Phillips on how valuable public support was to them, what are the best strategies for engaging the public, and who should be responsible for it?

Ensuring that the standards movement impacts all students

4. *The oft-ignored issue of equity and high expectations for all students.* Particularly, Broun asked, "who is the better keeper of the equity question?" Who is responsible for ensuring that the children who have the farthest to go

> to meet standards are given the resources to do that? As Conaty had pointed out earlier, the equity question has often, for good reasons, fallen by the wayside as educators and policymakers struggled to keep the focus on defining high expectations. Now that expectations have been defined, the education community finds itself returning to the question of how to make those expectations the reality for all students, some of whom are frequently not fully given the opportunity to meet those standards.

In addition to these four fundamental issues, there are several important issues that encompass all of them. There was consensus, for example, that states and districts will need to think about "moving from the three-legged strategy of standards, assessment, and accountability to a model that has a fourth leg – support," as Schmitt summed it up. Also, how can we continue to support research-based strategies, as Conaty discussed in the context of the Comprehensive School Reform Development program? Further, policymakers, educators, and the public need to realize, Schmitt stated, that raising standards isn't "just a three-year project." It's not finite, it's continuous, and we will *always* be focused on raising expectations and raising educator capacity – forever. Finally, group discussions revealed that many school systems are facing questions about the relative and appropriate roles of the state and district in reform – and yet key issues such as professional development need to be systematically addressed at every level.

Day 3, morning: State policy and its implications; putting it all together

The next morning the full group convened again, this time to talk about state policies, and then to pull their discussions together and develop some conclusive findings. The session featured two papers: one by Peg Goertz, a researcher at the University of Pennsylvania whose work provided a comprehensive look at state policy, and one by Nancy Grasmick, Superintendent of Maryland.

Leading off the session, Bob Schwartz of Achieve, Inc. provided a succinct summary of Goertz's paper, which he felt had important ramifications. First, he said, the paper tells us that standards matter. State standards have affected the way districts align their curriculum, the way they use data, and the way they go about improving schools. Goertz's paper does note, however, that standards have yet to make a significant impact on classroom instruction and practice. Second, Schwartz described that accountability systems can create incentives for improvement by focusing on data, encouraging multiple measures of assessment, and encouraging progress in the ways districts monitor student performance. Again, however, schools still need a great deal of assistance in linking accountability test results to changes in classroom practice.

State standards have impacted district operations, but have yet to meaningfully change classroom instruction and practice.

Goertz's paper also revealed that districts can play a critical role in building capacity. While the role of the district in reform is often debated, the study showed several successful district strategies:

1. Introducing **high-quality professional development** in a serious way through the creation of teacher networks, learning communities, and the spread of development of coaching and mentoring strategies.
2. Taking the lead in **reforming curriculum** to better align it with standards.
3. Providing help in the use of data and **bringing in improved research-based instruction strategies** and models that have some solid base of research, or reform designs such as those by New American Schools, to districts and making them available to schools.
4. **Empowering schools:** there are presently many serious efforts to push decision-making around budget or personnel issues and curricular issues down to the school level.
5. Building capacity by **focusing on the lowest-performing schools** and zeroing in with extra resources and support.

Goertz's paper revealed the importance of policy stability, policy strength (which includes legitimacy, power, prescriptiveness, and consistency), and policy guidance to solid state policy. Her paper also concluded that multiple points of accountability are needed (with multiple assessments) and that we need to balance between accountability for the individual and for the school. How much burden should one test carry? Finally, Goertz concluded, capacity building is important for policy success.

State Challenges: Diversity, urban needs, politics, accountability

The panel that followed spoke extensively about the role of states and the challenges they face. Ed Sontag of the Wisconsin governor's office noted that while many had spoken of the importance of disaggregated data, even that could be challenging for a state with a largely white and middle-class school population. Such conditions make it difficult to even convince the public and policymakers that a problem exists.

A Wish List for State Action:

- Have an urban strategy. Don't act as if the cities are just like other districts.
- Have a professional development strategy.
- Document and share good practices.
- Don't just publish test scores and call it accountability. Show what schools need to do to improve.
- Emphasize formative assessments, and provide results by student.
- Help schools manage their data.
- Help manage public relations. Publish documents in multiple languages, for example.
- Clear space – eliminate the little programs that complicate district and school agendas.
- Ultimately, follow a model of support, not of compliance and control.

–Ellen Guiney

For Ellen Guiney of the Boston Plan for Excellence, the challenges were largely those of any urban education system. And recently, the new Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), a state test based on standards, has been causing the kind of backlash that had already been talked about. New information suggested that more than 50 percent of Boston's students will likely fail the test when it is required for graduation. In response to the overall question of the state's role, Guiney came up with a "wish list" for what the state should do to provide the kind of support the district needs in meeting higher standards.

Jennifer Byler of the Virginia School Board then discussed the political challenges of school reform in Virginia, which, she noted, have been frequently very partisan. The process had both pitfalls – in the arena of public relations and information reporting – as well as victories. She had many successful ideas to share with the group, including an alternative certification program that encourages the state's many military

retirees to enter the classroom, and the state's new best practices centers. To Byler, the questions that the state still needs to face revolve around incentives and accountability – how do you provide incentives for schools to "go higher and reach farther?" – particularly the middle-level schools that still need improvement but are doing better than most. Byler also outlined some of the challenges she sees remaining at the state level both in Virginia and elsewhere. First, she said, reforming curriculum to meet standards will be a challenge for schools statewide, especially those who have not taken the standards movement seriously and are now running to catch up. In turn, the state will need to look for ways to empower districts to make decisions – particularly by providing resources and information about models, curriculum, and other strategies that can help districts. The state will also need to continue to communicate better with districts and the public, particularly about test scores. Finally, there is the challenge of professional development, a strategy for which has not been fully realized.

Finally, Nancy Grasmick discussed her paper, which describes Maryland's experiences with school reform and reflects many of the points made during the conference thus far. Stability had been an important factor there, as Goertz's paper suggested. The challenge the state faces now, after more than ten years of reform efforts, is enforcing accountability policies. Several schools have been declared "failing schools" long enough to make them eligible for reconstitution, and the state needs to make decisions about how to handle that. However, Grasmick added, accountability had redefined the role of the state department of education. It was, as Phillips' paper and Guiney's wish list suggested, more focused on support. It had also changed the face of instruction and teacher certification. The state focused more on identifying best practices, as countless people suggested during the conference. The challenge that remained for Maryland, Grasmick emphasized, was building instructional capacity through a strong, coherent professional development strategy – a difficult issue considering the conflict between expecting more of teachers and the teacher shortage.

State policies have made many positive changes, but challenges remain in the areas of professional development, communicating with the public, and providing resources to districts.

Putting It All Together

The discussion led into a more comprehensive conversation about what findings the group could agree on. Schwartz offered, as a starting point for the discussion, the report produced by the recent 1999 National Education Summit. This led the group to identify four broad categories that reflected the ones they had discussed the night before:

- **Helping Every Student Reach High Standards**
- **Improving Educator Capacity**
- **Accountability and Assessment Systems**
- **Public Will/Community Engagement**

Helping Every Student Reach High Standards

It was clear that one of the primary issues facing the standards movement at all levels is how to ensure that all students can meet high standards. How, CBE

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President Christopher Cross asked at the beginning of the conference, can we avoid the "floating standard" – raising and lowering standards for different groups of students? The group mentioned several strategies for helping every student reach higher standards:

- Focus resources and energy on the students who need them most – those who are falling behind or have special needs.
- Similarly, have an urban strategy. As Guiney said, "don't assume the cities are just like other districts."
- Build teacher capacity in instructional strategies – the more "tools" the teacher has in his or her "toolbox," Kaye Forgione of CBE commented, the more students he or she will be able to help.
- Develop strategies that change the fact that poor, low-performing schools are more likely to have new teachers, high turnover, or teachers teaching out of field.
- Continue to revisit and revise standards – "not all standards are created equal," as Rosenberg commented. This also means taking action to prioritize standards in a meaningful and academically valid way.
- Stop the dichotomizing of social promotion and retention. We all know that retention is an extremely poor strategy for helping students succeed. We all know we don't want students moving through the school system without the skills they need. And we all know that it means we need to focus on diagnosing students who need more help and time and making sure that it doesn't come to the end of the school year before helpful action is taken.
- Finally, as Welch noted, focus again not on what the teacher has taught, but on what the student has learned.

Improving Educator Capacity

Educator capacity, to the group, meant not just teachers or principals, but all adults who impact the quality of education provided to students. The group seemed to agree that the way to build educator capacity was through improved professional development – the kind that de-emphasizes, as Robinson described it, "one-shot workshops with a speaker who makes you laugh," and focuses on educators working together, building networks, and learning from themselves and each other. We know what good professional development looks like – there are existing standards for it. We just need to make it happen.

Some additional ideas for improved professional development suggested by the group included:

- Increased sharing of information about models of good practice.
- Increased teacher capacity through improved professional development that considers what the students are learning rather than what the teacher is doing.
- Teacher professional development should also incorporate analysis of student work, collaborative networks with other teachers and administrators, training in the use of data to drive instruction, and self-analysis through video or other methods.

Successful Strategy: Staff Development in Lancaster

In Lancaster, Vicki Phillips has worked to reenergize district staff development through three avenues. First, the reorganized Office of Teaching and Learning provides information on standards in practice, runs content institutes to improve teacher knowledge, provides an assessment database, as well as coaching, strategies, and curricular materials. Second, school-based instructional facilitators provide coaching, feedback about practice, and promote internal accountability. Finally, teacher-led networks promote and strengthen communication, encourage creative problem solving, and deepen teachers' understanding of practice. **–Vicki Phillips**

- Professional development should be a continuous spectrum from training through long-term development.
- Principal capacity also should be collaborative and based on networks, and principals in training should have the opportunity to learn some of the most important skills in running a successful school: use of data, assessment issues, instruction, leadership, management, and mentoring skills.

Accountability and Assessment Systems

These were two very thorny issues for the group. On one hand, accountability and assessment are the "teeth" that can make standards for all students a reality. On the other hand, such initiatives are frequently implemented in ways that work against the very goals of the standards movement and undermine public support. As Rosenberg said, "you want the accountability, but there are serious unintended consequences." The "train wreck" Guiney sees approaching in Massachusetts is one example, and many other states have had to seriously revise or dismantle their aggressive testing and accountability programs. What, then, can be done to develop accountability and assessment systems that help provide the right incentives for every student and every school to meet high standards?

Successful Strategy: Assessment at East Jessamine High School, Nicholasville, Kentucky

At East Jessamine High School (EJHS), principal Tom Welch encourages teachers to consider more standards-based assessments. In the French II class that he taught, responsibility for learning was shifted to the student. Students were assessed with performance events that had been designed and refined by foreign language teachers in the district and that were based on the national standards in foreign language. Rubrics were set in advance, and whenever possible, the school's foreign language teachers graded each others' students.

Additionally, portfolios play a significant role in student assessment at EJHS. Writing portfolios are required statewide, and at EJHS, the portfolio has been incorporated into other subject areas. Sometimes portfolios even include video, audio, or PowerPoint presentations.

This approach has taken time to develop at EJHS, but by continually training teachers in the use of standards and giving them opportunities to work together, these type of assessments have become more widespread. –Tom Welch

One key way is to utilize multiple measures. Don't rely on just one test. Joan Evans, Director of Standards-Based Education for Los Angeles Unified School District, noted that Los Angeles was "implementing an assessment system that aligns to multiple measures to evaluate student achievement of the standards." This system, Evans elaborated, will include a matrix of a standards-aligned norm-referenced test, course grades based upon uniform district scoring guides/rubrics, and performance-based tests and assignments created by CRESST (National Center for Research on Evaluation of Standards and Student Testing). Such systems can also include portfolios, school-level tests, state tests, or Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate results. The goal is, Evans added, "not only to get a truer read on the achievement level of the child," but also to alleviate some of the public's concerns about high-stakes exams. However, Cross added, this needs to be done in a way that does not appear lenient or appears that not all students have to meet high standards. It must also not result in many fragmented and conflicting tests, as Rosenberg warned. States, districts, and schools, she said, need good examples of what multiple measures mean, and what they do not mean. Some other recommendations:

- Use assessment for diagnostic intervention.
- Disaggregated data is a valuable tool. No system should be praised for improved student achievement if *all* groups of students are not improving. However, the public needs to be informed about the use of such data.

Successful Strategy: Formative Assessments

Boston Plan for Excellence, Boston, Massachusetts

Schools participating in the Boston Plan for Excellence's 21st Century Schools model have been collecting and using formative data about each student that include individually administered reading tests and writing prompts, administered three times a year. A custom Microsoft Access database tracks individual student data. This data allows teachers to sit and work together to talk about strategies and plans for each student, and, in fact, the process encourages the whole school to work together. –Ellen Guiney

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- Accountability should apply to everyone in the system: Jennifer O'Day from the University of Wisconsin described it as "reciprocal accountability." According to this notion, she suggested, "the system is also accountable to the people in the schools to provide resources and other support that they need in order to be able to do the work that they're expected to do." With this support, educators in schools can legitimately be held accountable for giving all students the necessary learning opportunities to meet the standards, and the students can be held accountable for meeting them. The district's role is thus two-fold: to provide the requisite resources and assistance, and to ensure that those resources result in high-quality learning opportunities for students.
- Finally, accountability measures are much more meaningful if some of them are face-to-face: teachers observing each other, principals observing classrooms.

Public Will/Community Engagement

The importance of public support came up repeatedly during the course of the conference. The largest challenge facing schools, boards, districts, and states in terms of community support is how to disseminate one message with many voices. There are various levels of authority in the public school system, and they each shoulder the responsibility for informing the public. The group saw a series of roles that they felt could be successful in garnering public support.

- Schools: constantly inform parents, constantly invite parent and community involvement, constantly provide a wide variety of opportunities for volunteers.
- Districts, boards, states: consistently and constantly provide information to parents and the community, particularly about sticky issues such as test scores.

The group agreed there is a need for candor and honesty in these dialogues, a point Cross highlighted. Additionally, the issues surrounding test scores and data, like those in Virginia as described by Byler, demand that school systems take the time to educate the public about data to encourage ownership and understanding, instead of fear. Public support in this area, as Ron Cowell of the Education Policy and Leadership Center in Pennsylvania said, "is the only way we will be able to withstand the political turmoil of bad news."

Successful Strategy: Mission Junior High School

At Mission, parents are involved in every aspect of the school. There is a strong parent/teacher organization that, among other things, sets up parenting workshops, and a parental liaison who recruits parent volunteers. Open houses, called Celebrations, are held every six weeks. Parent involvement, Mona Parras explained, must fit the unique needs of each school. For example, in Mission, when a large manufacturing plant closed, she used that setback to bring parents into the school. Calling the ones she knew had been laid off, she pointed out that now they had free time during the day and why not come down to the school to help out? This gave unemployed parents something productive to do, bolstering the whole community, and many parents continued to volunteer even when they had found other work. The result of this? When the school had a thank-you luncheon for staff, every classroom was covered – by a parent.

–Mona Parras

Conclusion

As the conference came to a close, the group felt as if some valuable and useful findings had been developed that would be of use to school leaders, administrators, policymakers, and educators. While Goertz's paper indicates that standards are not yet having the desired effect on classroom instruction, there was a broad consensus that standards can in fact make that change and improve instruction in a way that helps students. By focusing on the "hows" of implementing standards, the participants took important steps in defining how to continue down the road of standards-driven reform and ensure that it has the desired impact on classrooms, schools, districts, and ultimately, students.

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PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Helping Every Student Reach High Standards

- Provide assistance for students who have the furthest to go to meet the standards, and have a specific strategy for urban districts.
- Develop a strategy for getting the best teachers with the most needy students.
- Focus attention on the academic mission of every school.
- Empower students to meet the standards.
- Revisit, revise, and prioritize standards.
- Benchmark standards and assessments to ensure that all students are held to high expectations.
- Rather than focus on the debate between social promotion and retention, emphasize early intervention and continuous help for students who need it.
- Share and disseminate high-quality instructional models of good practice and make better use of research on instruction.
- Always go back to the question of what is best for the students.

Improving Educator Capacity

- Improve professional development to meet existing standards; focus on collaboration, networks, and continuous training.
- Principal training should include instructional leadership, mentoring issues, management skills, use of data, and encourage networking between principals.
- Teacher professional development should encourage teachers to be reflective about their teaching, be collaborative, and focus on student work.
- Utilize on-site coaching and internal capacity.
- Improve preservice through partnerships with higher education, alternative certification programs, and mentoring programs.
- Change the focus from "what is the teacher doing?" to "what are the students learning?"
- Ensure that professional development for teachers and principals has a continuous focus on how to achieve high standards.

Accountability and Assessment Systems

- Have "reciprocal" accountability at all levels of the school system. Are states and districts supporting schools? Are schools supporting teachers? Are schools providing ample learning opportunities for students? Are standards being met?
- Develop assessment systems with multiple measures – without having many fragmented tests.
- Utilize assessments for diagnostic purposes, and use the data to drive instruction.
- Improve agreement between school, district, and state assessments.
- Improve alignment between standards, course offerings and requirements, and assessment systems.
- Use disaggregated data – but be sure to explain it thoroughly to the public.

Public Will/Community Engagement

- Schools should make continuous efforts and provide endless opportunities for parents to get involved – "always invite."
- Districts, schools, boards, and states should be constantly keeping the public informed – but offer one message with many voices. Every level has responsibility for communicating with the public.
- Educate the public about data to encourage understanding and ownership instead of fear.
- Respond to criticisms, but build on the consensus around standards.
- Make use of school boards and district superintendents to broaden media and public understanding of standards.
- Be candid – it helps keep public trust.

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Conference Papers

Standards-Based Reform and Changing the Metaphor of School: The Principal's Perspective
by Tom Welch

Challenges of Improving Instruction: A View from the Classroom
by Deborah Loewenberg Ball and David K. Cohen

Finishing the Race: A District Perspective of Standards-Based Reform
by Vicki L. Phillips

Looking Back at a Decade of Reform: The Maryland Standards Story
by Nancy S. Grasmick

Implementing Standards-Based Reform: Challenges for State Policy
by Margaret E. Goertz

Standards-Based Reform and Changing the Metaphor of School: The Principal's Perspective

by Tom Welch
Principal, East Jessamine High School, Nicolasville, Kentucky

Introduction

All too frequently, teachers, students, and principals find themselves in a sort of *Groundhog Day* version of education: every day, every year, we wake up enthusiastic that this time we will "get it right," and yet find ourselves playing the game of school the same way we always have. We focus on seat time; the teacher stands at the front of the room and talks; students remain passive learners, eagerly counting the number of days until summer vacation.

At one school, East Jessamine High, though, this spell has been broken. Taking the opportunity to start a new school from scratch, we at East High have defined a vision that focuses on student-centered learning and high standards. There, my role as principal is vital: I am bound to teachers and students in the implementation of that vision. I do this by leading by example; by teaching one class every semester and teaching in a standards-based way; and by running a school where everything is focused on standards and achievement.

"Groundhog Day"

The metaphor of school is deeply embedded in our culture. It seems that even preschoolers know how the game is played. I've watched them. One will arrange chairs in very neat rows – the teacher. The others will file in and sit – they are the students and they already know their role. The teacher explains a lesson on the board; they have work to do in class; some will misbehave, and the teacher will have to discipline them. The game often begins to break down at this point with some of the students leaving the room and the game altogether.

I must admit that playing school seems to follow the plot of *Groundhog Day* more closely than *Goodbye Mr. Chips*. I cling to the romantic notion that hard-working teachers will evoke a love of learning in each and every student, instilling in them lofty personal goals and a sense of pride and responsibility in their school and their personal lives. I imagine them as they get off the buses that first day each fall. The students arrive complete with new tennis shoes and high hopes. Every fall the teachers greet them, flashing the rested smile of the veteran hero. Teachers stand by their door with full rosters and just enough desks to accommodate all their eager charges. Somehow, as the weeks turn into months, the roster begins to thin, along with both the tennis shoes and the smiles. By spring, too often students and teachers alike are holding out for the end, counting down the final weeks, then days. The account of student shortcomings is finally taken in each class, dutifully recorded on the report cards of those who managed to hang on through the final scene. Suddenly it's summer; the new salary schedule shows teachers the inadequate increase for the next year. The summary statement from the retirement system validates another year of service. The sigh of relief is heaved, and then just like in *Groundhog Day*, the alarm goes off. We get up again and look outside hoping it will be different. We arrive at the school and there are the students, complete with new tennis shoes and high hopes. The teachers are there greeting them, flashing the rested smile of the veteran hero . . . somewhere the idealism that drives many of us to look for Mr. Chips in ourselves and our colleagues has mutated. We find ourselves looking more like the characters in *Groundhog Day*, desperately trying over and over again to somehow "get it

right." But by the ninth day of the new year, some have already figured out that the school year is already 5 percent over.

How do we "get it right," or at least "righter?" How do we shift the focus from shortcomings to achievement? How do we use lessons from the past to inform decisions, policies and practices for the future? How do we begin to slough off the pernicious practices of the familiar metaphor so that we can refocus on learning that is meaningful, relevant, and lasting? The answer in our district is to look at the possibilities offered in a standards-based approach.

The Principal's Role in a Standards-Based School

My particular perspective, as principal of a rural Kentucky high school in the process of implementing a standards-based approach, should be seen as exactly that, my particular perspective. Examples from our school do not point to a fail-safe road for the journey but should serve as postcards from the route. I take to heart the familiar adage: "Traveler, there is no path; the path is made by walking it."

At East High, the focus on vision and the practice of implementation are key elements in creating and running a standards-based school. The role of the principal in that is to bring everyone in the school together – teachers, students, administrators – in a bond with each other and with me in the implementation of the vision for a standards-based approach. The principal must understand the concept of a standards-based approach with a thoroughness that is evident in practice. Espoused theory and theory in practice need to be kept as close together as possible.

Enter my office, close the door, and you will see a sign bearing my personal theme for the year, *Apprivoisons-nous!* Let me explain. In French there are two verbs that are translated by the single English verb, "to tame." The first verb is *domestiquer*, meaning to tame as one would tame or domesticate a dog or other pet. The other term, *apprivoiser*, means to tame in the sense of establishing ties to or bonds with each other. My favorite image of this verb is the three-legged race where the runners are bound to each other. If they learn to move in sync, they find they can easily work together. My slogan for the year means that we must bind ourselves to one another if we are to be successful in working with our students.

This role plays out in several ways. Shifting the paradigm, sloughing off the metaphor is extremely difficult. For that reason, the two assistant principals and I try to lead by example. We each teach a class every day. If we can't make it work, why should we expect others to try? From the design of the course outcomes to the assessments of those outcomes, the principals in our building are creating and implementing the vision for a standards-based approach. I have had the opportunity to experiment with the concepts in a variety of courses. Despite the temptation to teach the appealing AP French class and work with some of the best and brightest in the school, I decided that there wouldn't be much to gain. The complaint that the principal was out of touch with what it was like to be in a classroom would just be replaced with the wry observation that anyone could teach *those* students, and they would probably be right. Besides, the AP courses also tend to be the smallest classes in our school and most of our teachers work with classes of 25 to 30, rather than the 10 to 12 found in our foreign language AP classes. I don't think a standards-based approach is as important for the top 10 percent of a school as it is for the remaining 90 percent. After all, some students would discover, achieve, and excel no matter what the approach. Instead, I've worked with a broader cross section of students.

The first course I taught at the new school was a basic speech class. There were 32 students in the class; they ranged from freshmen to seniors and from alpha to omega in ability level. There were students who would be vying for the honor of valedictorian, and students whose IEP (Individual Education Plan – required for special education students) showed the need for a great deal of accommodation and adaptation. The class was a wonderful challenge and also a wonderful testing ground.

Second semester I picked up a French II class. What an experience! Because I had served on the committee responsible for drafting the national *Student Standards for Foreign Language Learning*, I had a deep-seated commitment to seeing if a truly standards-based approach could work realistically in the classroom. I explained to the students from the beginning that their grade would be determined by their proficiency *vis à vis* those standards, rather than an average cooked up with the help of canned test alchemy. I made it a point to communicate the approach to parents from the beginning. No Friday vocabulary tests, no monthly tests, and no killer final. Instead, the responsibility for learning shifted to the student. They were aware all semester long that they would be assessed on what they could do with what they were learning. At the end of the term the gradebook didn't have a single daily grade recorded; it didn't have any test or quiz entries. Instead, students were assessed at the marking periods on their success with performance events, which had been designed and refined over two years by the district's foreign language teachers. At level II, the performance event had the students check into a French hotel and speak with the clerk about the amenities in the room, billing procedures, where to find restaurants with particular fare, etc. Whenever possible with our schedules, the foreign language teachers would assess each others' students. Since the rubric was set in advance, there was great consistency in arriving at an assessment score. Rubrics for success with the performance events were given to the students at the time the events were explained, weeks ahead of their presentations.

The other important factor in determining a student's grade was the portfolio. For nearly a decade, Kentucky students have worked with a portfolio containing their best writing. These portfolios are assessed at grades 4, 8, and 12, and in our district a senior will not receive a diploma without a writing portfolio that is above a novice level. The notion of a high stakes portfolio was nothing new to my students. Their portfolio for my class was a collection of samples of their best work in each of the foreign language standards. The samples had to be accompanied by an analysis that explained why their chosen samples were indicators of work on those particular standards. We had decided as a class that their portfolios might include everything from video and audiotapes to computer disks with PowerPoint presentations and pen and paper writing samples.

In addition to leading by example, my role includes helping teachers make their classrooms more standards-based. I have found that I must also spend the time necessary to turn the experience at working with standards into a resource for other teachers who are still trying to develop a standards-based course. This means sitting down with teachers to go over standards and assessments for individual courses. One interesting spin-off from taking the time to examine course expectations and standards is the ability to provide a communication link between courses, where the content used to help students reach a standard may be useful in another discipline as well. Assessments can often be shared across departments if there is sufficient communication about the standards involved.

While walking through the building can help give rise to ideas about implementation, it is also a very valuable tool to help teachers make their classrooms more standards-based. By virtue of the position of principal, presence seems to precipitate practice. The more closely teachers identify me with a standards-based approach, the more they are reminded of the approach when I am in the room. There are several ways that I have tried to help teachers identify me with standards. One way is to keep them informed of my involvement with standards at every level. I try to be very open about my involvement with the Standards Design Team at the district level, sharing at faculty meetings, even briefly, the work that is going on. Another method of helping teachers understand the level of expectation for implementation was the syllabus development work we did before school opened. Teachers were given a guide to use in development of their course syllabi that explained the necessity of starting with the National Standards from their discipline, using the Kentucky Academic Expectations and Core Content from the Program of Studies, and finally including district standards work. These syllabi help to form a useful starting point during evaluation meetings in both

the pre and post conferences. They also serve to help the teachers understand my level of commitment to the approach.

I also have tried to help teachers be aware of my struggles with standards implementation as we discuss daily teaching life informally in the faculty workroom while running off materials, or in my office as they drop by to visit, get a purchase order signed, or pick up a piece of candy. It's not that every conversation is centered around standards implementation; it's more a matter of embedding a standards approach into the fabric of what I do so that discussion of it forms a natural part of our professional exchanges.

Opportunities abound for the principal to help the rest of the community of learners to understand the nature of the shift to a standards-based approach. Rather than oversee the issuing of edicts, we have tried to establish standards that govern many aspects of school life. This has to be one of my major roles as principal, guiding the community in the implementation of standards through personal commitment to a standards-based approach. For instance, in discussions with the superintendent, we now examine our own performance as administrators in light of the ISLE Standards for School Leaders, as adopted by the KDE Educational Professional Standards Board (1998). As another example of implementation of a standards-based approach, our coaches are at work on the final draft of a set of "Coaching Standards and Expectations (1999)." These standards will be the guide for conduct and evaluation of our coaching staffs. At the student behavior level, we have moved away from trying to define every infraction and devise a rule to avoid it. In its place, students working with teachers have developed a set of rights and responsibilities which are the standards defining expectations for students. The principal must seize every opportunity to close the gap between the espoused theory of a standards-based approach and the practice of it.

The Standards-Based, Student-Centered School

In implementing a vision of student-centered, rigorous, standards-driven learning, I had a unique opportunity to help design that vision in a newly created school. There had been one high school with 1700 students in the district, and with continuing population pressure the decision was made to split that school into two smaller schools, rather than add on to create a mega-high school. I was asked to be the principal of this yet-to-be built school and agreed on the condition that, among other things, I would still have the opportunity to teach a class and be responsible for a group of learners. At first, the creation of a standards-based school looked a lot like creation of almost anything in public education. It began with ideas in the hearts and minds of a few folks and then turned into a series of meetings with teachers, architects, administrators, parents, and students.

As planning for the new high school continued, an even more exciting and expansive vision of the school evolved. First of all, we were committed to the idea that we would create a student-centered learning environment. Our second commitment was to a school where rigorous academic challenge and opportunity would become the norm. Finally, we knew that we wanted a school that would be inviting to all members of the community, not just students and parents, but to a much wider community than we usually considered. We decided that even though the school sits in a bit of a valley, we would be a beacon on a hill.

The other planners and myself had inspiration in creating this vision. As we considered the design of the school, we read widely, we discussed and discussed, and we also made a few visits to other schools. We had followed some of the recommendations from the NASSP publication, *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* (1996). I also found an influential work to be a rather lengthy, unpublished manuscript entitled "Learning on the Edge of Chaos" by Cleveland, Neuroth, and Marshall (1995). That manuscript introduced us to the concept of "chaordic" thinking, the notion that true learning happens best on that very thin line between chaos and order. Too much order and no new learning results. Too much chaos and the result is the same. There must be a delicate balance between the two. The article described a school where this notion had been put into place, the Illinois Math and Science Academy. IMSA is a public residential

magnet program attracting many of that state's most outstanding students. As soon as I read the article, I thought, "Well, we've go to go there." I got on the phone, and called Stephanie Pace Marshall, IMSA's executive director and arranged for a meeting. Six of us ended up on a one-day visit that was as instructive and inspiring as any visit I've ever made. Dr. Marshall was also generous enough to give the group a great deal of her time that day to discuss and react to the article and its manifestations at IMSA. During the course of the discussion she also mentioned a book entitled *Leadership and the New Science* by Margaret Wheatley (1992). This led to another phone call and eventually the chance to participate in a stimulating four-day conference with Dr. Wheatley at Sundance in Utah.

I remember standing outside doing bus duty one day soon after I had started teaching in the school system. As I saw the students getting on the bus, I saw in the behavior and in the mien of students a look that broadcast a certain disregard for learning, and school. I tried to mentally contrast our students with what I imagined students from one of the nation's best prep schools must look like and talk about as they got on and off the bus. I think I even shook my head as I lamented to myself that for the most part our students didn't even know what rigor, challenge, and excellence look like. I was reminded of a saying of a respected colleague: "Those who don't know, don't know they don't know." Our students didn't even know. Fortunately ignorance is curable. The lamentation in the bus lane became one of the reasons that a standards-based approach appealed to me. If nothing else, our students would have the chance to find out what the expectations and standards are in a larger context. They would have access to the level of ideas challenging students at IMSA or at any other great school. They would have the chance to meet the challenges and compete. They would have a chance to find out that education and real learning go far beyond the pages of a text.

All of the ideas generated in those early months and years have developed into a series of iterations of an education idea that is fractal in nature. The pattern is the same at many different levels of focus, but there is a lot that is unrecognizable when the perspective is too close or too distant. Take for instance the idea that the school would be student-centered. There were colleagues who thought we somehow meant that it would be student-controlled. Rather, what we have tried to implement is an approach where every decision is made in light of the questions: "Is this best for students?" and "Will this result in an increase in learning?" Before we ever set foot in the building, we established guiding principles for the school that cover the area of People, Places, Programs, and Policies. Rather than back ourselves into a rule-driven environment, we have set out these principles to guide decisions in each of these areas. As a result of all this, perhaps the most deeply-seeded philosophy permeating the school is the notion that absolutely everything that goes on in the building provides an opportunity for learning.

With approximately the same number of combined students projected for two schools as for the single school, no increase in faculty was projected. With the notion that teachers would be most effective where they were happiest, the faculty was given the option of choosing the school where they wanted to teach. The principal of the existing school and I presented our ideas about the directions of the schools at a faculty meeting in September, and by the end of October, the faculty indicated their choice and final decisions about placements were made. Predictably, many of the veteran teachers, comfortable with their environment, content in their niche, opted to stay in the original building. Teachers with perhaps a more pioneering spirit opted for the school run by three of their colleagues: the French teacher, the Spanish teacher, and the band teacher – none of whom had worked a day as a school administrator.

I woke up one day to find that it was no longer *Groundhog Day*. I no longer had to play school. I was principal of a new high school, trying to create and nurture a standards-based approach. Important groundwork had been laid at the teacher level, with the fostering of an environment where experimentation and creativity in a context of rigorous academic adventure was the norm rather than the exception.

We have two iterations of the standards-based approach that are currently active. In the first, our vision is to have every high school student enrolled in one of two Academies, either the Math/Science Academy, or the Social Science/Humanities Academy. The Academy provides a way of organizing the

school, using programs of study with national standards for students. Within the Academies, there are ten focus areas ranging from Engineering and Related Technologies to Personal, Social, and Government Services. Students who opt for the Academy orientation spend their freshmen and sophomore years preparing to pass the C.I.M. (Certificate of Initial Mastery) tests in science, math, language arts, and social studies for acceptance into the Junior Division of an Academy. The C.I.M. is based on the national standards in each of these areas. In addition, they are also assessed on attendance, discipline, and work habits. During the junior or senior year, the students enter the Senior Division of an Academy, participate in job-shadowing, meet with a mentor, and complete a "Capstone" project. The emphasis in the Academies is the attainment of the C.I.M. certification, the local guarantee that students meet an internationally benchmarked standard in basic academic and job-readiness skills, set at what students in the best-performing countries can do at age 16.

Parallel to the Academies movement has been the work to see that each course we offer reflects a commitment to a standards-based approach. This has been aided greatly by the tremendous district commitment to professional development. This year, as mentioned above, all course syllabi were to be done using a standards-based approach. Instead of giving students a list of topics that would be covered during the term, teachers were given a guide to use in development of their course syllabi. Teachers were to define the standards which students would be expected to meet by the term's end and the way they would be assessed on meeting those standards. This year, instead of the endless lists of covered topics, I saw syllabi that detailed the courses' relevant national standards, Kentucky standards, and went on to include guiding questions, and assessments.

Our first year as a school committed to standards may not have looked much different from other schools except for some tinkering around the edges and some limited success in isolated classrooms. By the second year, a committee introduced the Academies approach for consideration by the school council. Meetings continued on standards-implementation, using both local resources and individuals from the national level who could share their expertise and offer suggestions. This third year we have seen waning and waxing. This leads us to a discussion of the slow, evolutionary nature of change in schools and the many obstacles and difficulties that can be found along the way.

Obstacles to Success

In some ways it would be comforting to pick up "The Joy of Schooling." I could imagine opening up to the chapter on Preparing a Standards-Based School and finding a list of ingredients and a set of directions for careful but successful preparation. It doesn't exist. It is more akin to listening to a Kentucky grandmother explain how to make rolled biscuits. It has to do with a pinch of that and a gob of something else, but the true magic will be found in the combination of the ingredients at hand and the skill of the cooks. It will be personal in nature and reflect the personality and characteristics of the chefs. Of course, if the oven won't light, there will be problems, no matter how great the skill and desire of the cook. Have we had problems and encountered barriers? Absolutely!

The Old Metaphor of School

Without a doubt in my mind, the single most difficult hurdle has been that deep-seated, firmly engrained metaphor of school. Sometimes in an administrative meeting, when we are trying to look at things from this new perspective, we will review an incident involving students or teachers and conclude, "They just don't get it!" It is very difficult when everyone knows how the game used to be played and now the field and all the rules are different. "The best teachers keep the tightest control on their students." That's one of the changed rules. That may keep a school the quietest, but it doesn't follow that it's the environment where the most learning occurs. Remember the principle of chaordic thinking – that the real excitement and the real action come at the intersection of chaos and order?

Another precept of the metaphor is that teachers should assign all the work. I find it quite interesting that some of the latest information on brain research (Sprenger, 1999) indicates that in studies of rats, the ones doing the work learn the most; they develop the most synapses. In many classrooms I see students often watching teachers work. No wonder the teachers think the students aren't keeping up; we're not giving them the chances they need.

I'm guilty of this as well. One of the projects in the finite math class I now teach is to have students work with attendance data from the school. This is a concrete way to get at some of the NCTM standards. For example, Standard 4 says that *students should understand attributes, units and systems of measurement.* (Revised Standards draft, 1999) One way to get at this is to "select an appropriate unit of measurement or scale and understand the effects of the choices that are made." This is a perfect way to describe the difference in their graphing the attendance data with bar graphs where the percentages go from 90 to 100 as opposed to 1 to 100. The students in the class have not been challenged over the years to produce high quality work and their first attempts to produce the large charts for posting in the hallways did not meet my expectations. We struggled back and forth as they tried to tell me that my standards were too high and I tried to encourage them to the level of excellence that I know they can achieve in the preparation and analysis of the data. The temptation is just to do it myself and produce the charts quickly in my office -- a good example of where the "rat" doing the work would be learning the most. My desire to have them take more responsibility for the learning, develop the concept that the course didn't necessarily have to be approached linearly, and make a habit of relating work in class to the standards was quite clear to me. It just happened to escape the ones who mattered most. I gave in to the temptation to spend the ten minutes it would take me at home to complete the assignment, and rationalized that at least this go around the work that would result was more important than the product necessary to get them there. I won. I was the "rat" who benefited. That meant that the students didn't gain as much as they could have. I hoped to make it up to them later.

The Evolutionary Nature of Change

One of the greatest barriers to implementation has been the evolutionary nature of the change. There is no single plan or program that will get a school, district, or state to a mythical endpoint. Therefore, the target seems to be very elusive. Just when we think we are getting close to a goal, we realize the fractal nature of the project and have to refocus at either a micro or macro level.

Change is also slow, and success occurs along a spectrum, varying from teacher to teacher. I have seen this move through a variety of stages. Despite our efforts and attempts at professional development, some teachers have tried to ignore the change entirely, preferring instead to keep teaching in the ways they have always taught, probably with a text-based approach, making sure they cover what they consider to be essential content. Next, are those who are aware of the change and at least pay lip service to the concept. I find this most often with those who have met the requirement for a syllabus that reflects a standards-based approach. Examining the syllabus, I can see that they are at least familiar with the standards in their discipline, but I can also see on the syllabus and then receive confirmation in class visits that it is really just lip service; things are going on as they always have. They just don't get it.

Then there is that third group. They have kept up professionally through the years and their drive for helping students achieve at higher and higher levels is now focused on standards. Even here, it is a struggle. They are eager to do whatever is necessary to help students achieve at higher levels, but I often find that the emphasis for them is still on what *they* are doing, not on what the students are doing. My litmus test for this is to ask the students in the classroom about the goals for the class. I sometimes do this in casual conversation with the students in the cafeteria, or in other situations where I am asking them about what is going on in their classes. I used to think I could elicit a response about standards with an indirect question. For instance, after asking them about the most interesting thing they had done in a class the previous week, I would ask them what the point of the project or field trip might have been. I would hope to hear some version of a standard, stated perhaps in student terms, but I never heard that. Their analysis always seemed

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to be on the micro level – a link to the exact concept they were working with, but never a larger context that resembled a standard. I tried asking students about teachers whom I knew were implementing a standards-based approach and the response varied little.

I was recently visiting in the office of the District Curriculum supervisor. We were discussing another of the initiatives in the district and the professional development plans revolving around it. She commented that her central office colleague who was most immediately responsible for it was convinced that if everyone had the training on the program we would see it succeed. I remember being utterly amazed. The colleague really thought it was a matter of getting the right program, the right structures, the right approach. I guess that summarizes the two positions of implementation we often see. One emphasizes getting the program right. The other emphasizes getting the people right. My patience with some of the well-intended initiatives that have come down from the state has worn thin at times. It seems they often look at successful schools and try to determine which programs they have instituted that have made them successful. While that may not be a bad thing to do, I find that it overlooks the differences between a present and sufficient condition. The fatal step is in the conclusion. If these schools are successful and they do this or that, then doing this or that will make any school successful. *Voila.* This or that mandate is born. While they may have identified a condition that was present, I would argue that it was not sufficient. What is necessary are individuals committed to the concept, rather than the concept alone. Remember the slogan on my door? *Apprivoisons-nous!* I find this comes closer to defining the sufficient and necessary condition. A standards-based approach will work for our students only if we are successful in convincing enough individuals on the faculty that this is truly what our students need for success.

The Resentment Factor

In addition, there is always the resentment factor at work. Although we have done as much as we can think of to keep everyone informed of the process and the discussions along the way, there are always those in the system who think that decisions regarding change for their professional lives are being made behind closed doors. A fundamental question is: "Who should be involved?" Inviting everyone would be difficult because of inherent problems in trying to schedule when everyone who wanted to could attend. It would also be difficult because of the impossibility of coming up with a product where 100 people try to craft a single document. I think I developed a new appreciation for Thomas Jefferson and the fact that he ended up writing most of the Declaration of Independence by himself and then bringing it back for the others to edit. We'd probably still find ourselves trying to beat the summer heat in Independence Hall if every one of the delegates had an equal voice in the wording of the document. By the same token, I laugh to myself sometimes and ask if our district staff think there is some Moses who is descending with a new covenant of some sort. My news to them would be that there is nothing etched in stone; it's all found in sweat and discarded drafts.

Which Standards?

Another challenge along the way has been to determine which set of standards to use. We had hoped to have some parallelism across the disciplines and still maintain the integrity of the original standards from the various disciplines. What we have ended up with is a descending series of standards which start with those from the national organizations, and then at the next level include the input of Kentucky's Academic Expectations and Core Content for assessment. Finally, we have district level expectations and standards. They are based on the other two levels and use the particular curricular elements from our district to provide the means of achieving the standards. It seems at times to be a rather cumbersome load to expect teachers and students to bear. The temptation is to focus on one of the sets, rather than on all three. Frankly, if I heard of teachers doing that, I'd be thrilled. At least that would be an assurance that the approach was there, and with the connections made among those three levels, as an administrator I would

know that the students were well on their way to acquiring the knowledge and skills that we have determined to be vital.

Incentives and Accountability

We have worked hard on professional development opportunities for teachers to make sure that they are ready to change the way the game is played. What about the students? My experience is that we are missing a professional development need that targets students and explains why and how the game is changing for them. Perhaps one of the reasons for that is because we have not yet been able to come up with clear ways to reward them. They have been playing the game in order to amass the tokens (Carnegie units) necessary to "go out." Switching to a standards-based approach, but leaving the student reward tied to seat time creates a real disconnect. The NASSP report recommended that "The Carnegie unit will be redefined or replaced so that high schools no longer equate seat time with learning." (1996) The Kentucky Legislature granted the Kentucky State Board of Education the right to award credits based on performance, rather than on Carnegie units. The catch is that no one seems to have been able to devise an alternative yet with which they are comfortable enough to go to the State Board, and which they are confident the colleges and universities will accept. The implications for standards-based credits are huge and would affect every element of administrative life in the school. Maybe that's one reason a standards-based approach has had difficulty catching on. Looking down the road very far creates a great deal of discomfort with many more questions than answers. So far it might seem it also offers more difficulties than it does advantages. I would return to the guiding principles that have driven our district to this point. We are intent on establishing a truly student-centered learning environment and we believe a standards-based approach is the best for our students. Our responsibility is to figure out how to overcome the problems so that our students can benefit.

Assessments and Accountability

The issue of incentives also comes into play when considering state and district-level assessments. In Kentucky, a school and a district have a great deal of latitude when it comes to experimentation. One of the highlights of my professional career was to be an educator in the Commonwealth in the late 1980s and early 1990s and to be a part of shaping the sweeping changes. The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), passed in 1990, opened the door to change. The efforts of the Council on School Performance Standards led to the development of 75 Valued Outcomes, standards for each student in the state. The political climate eventually led to changing the 75 Valued Outcomes to 57 Academic Expectations, but the result was a state-wide focus on what students should know and be able to do. The expectations were ambitious. One of them states, for instance, that "Students will understand and communicate in a second language." (2.28) So far, we have discovered that what is not tested is not valued. Because the state assessments do not include an assessment on second language ability, many administrators see no real incentive for attending to it. This is understandable since currently, the entire measure of a school is based on results of the statewide assessments. Schools that do not make progress are subject to takeover by the state. Simply put, the state has said: "Produce results or else." Every school in the state has developed rather elaborate plans to make sure that their test scores are as high as possible. In many instances this has resulted in some excellent classroom changes. I think particularly of the new focus on open-response answers that ask for explanations of ideas, rather than merely filling in a bubble on a multiple-choice test. Another example would be the tremendous strides Kentucky students have made in the area of writing. Thanks to the writing portfolio and the emphasis on writing across the curriculum, the quality of student writing has improved significantly. This is probably the best example of a limited, standards-based approach. A holistic writing rubric was developed at the state level very early in the process. That rubric has been used across the board and is the clearest example of the level of change that can result when students know the standards to which they will be held, are familiar with them on a working basis, and have experience with them over a number of years.

Governance and Bureaucracy

The bureaucracy of the system can also slow up the process of change. When Kentucky first developed a model for governance based on the notion of School Based Councils, they would have been hard pressed to find a more ardent supporter. After all, our district's open-minded approach to faculty involvement in every aspect of the budgeting and hiring processes had been very successful in helping us implement change. Codifying that into a statewide system has, however, had the effect of slowing down change in our school. Every decision affecting the life of the school, from small things such as the daily bell schedule and the assignment of rooms, to important curricular issues, budget, and hiring must all go through the SBDM Council. Most SBDM Councils have from six to nine standing committees that do the legwork of the Council. The committees do the background research and hash out the policy recommendations to bring to the Council. Even if a committee meets only once or twice a month, the result has been that administrators can have meetings almost every afternoon and evening. Add to that the responsibility to see that each committee's agenda is set and published well in advance and that minutes of the committee are distributed to everyone as well, and it becomes a real challenge. And of course, one must not forget that one of the strengths of the SBDM process is the involvement of parents. That leads to the dilemma of scheduling Council meetings. If they are scheduled after school when teachers are available, few parents can attend. If they are scheduled in the evenings, then it is sometimes difficult to get teachers to return to the school for several more hours. While it would be tempting to skip a few of the meetings, I quickly learned that the committees need the input of a variety of perspectives. While I could always count on the attendance and participation of those with a special interest in the agenda, I discovered it was also necessary to have someone in attendance who could offer a school-wide perspective. Because full time teachers are so involved with their classes, it is unrealistic to expect them to be able to see from the vantage point of the administrative office. Thanks to a standards-based mindset, however, this year's committees have operated more smoothly, because at the beginning of the year each committee was charged with developing a set of guiding principles, standards, if you will. These principles are used to assess each of the decisions as well as the process of the committee. It has helped keep down potential infighting because members must evaluate the decision, based on deeper principles than the issue under discussion.

Policies guiding school governance may be seen to both encourage and impede the establishment of a standards-based approach. On the one hand, they give the individual school the freedom to pursue the course it thinks will work best. On the other hand, those same policies may slow down the change process to a snail's pace.

Overcoming Obstacles to Successful Standards Implementation

In a sense, standards are both the goal and the answer to the obstacles that stand in the way of their full implementation. In the case of governance and bureaucracy, we found that getting back to the fundamental principles and setting standards smoothed the way for more effective meetings and decision-making. This idea of getting back to the basic principles can be applied in many ways. I have found that increasing the number of student policies and regulations does little to change student behavior in desired ways. What we have found to work is the approach that starts with the standards we expect and encourages the behaviors to make that happen. I think it probably is the same for creating a standards-based approach. Rather than start with the inputs, the policies, the most important factor is to start with principles of what students in a course, a school, a district, or a state should achieve.

The state and district can also create conditions to help support the implementation of a standards-based approach. The next most important element is to provide both freedom and support to experiment. This may vary widely depending on the individuals involved. The success of implementation of a standards-based approach will, at most, reach the highest level where it is supported. If a teacher is trying to implement

a standards-based approach in the classroom but the principal is not supportive, it may succeed in that individual classroom but will likely go no farther. If a principal is committed to the notion, but the superintendent or district personnel are not in agreement with the approach, then it may succeed in the school but will not be expanded beyond the building. As with so many initiatives, in the final analysis it is not so much a matter of the strength of the policy that may have mandated the approach, but a matter of the strength of the individuals who are committed to the principles behind them.

Finally, it is possible to fight back against the metaphor of school by consistently challenging the way we teach. By always going back to the vision of standards-based reform, we continuously work toward the goal.

In Finite Math, I told the students on the first day that we would be taking a standards-based approach. I let them know some of the ways I thought that would change the course and the nature of instruction. I also told them that math class traditionally always went the same way: start class with a review of the previous night's homework, move on to explain the new concept, assign guided practice (in class work) and end with independent practice (homework). I promised that this class would be different and if they found me lapsing back into that old paradigm they should stop and let me know. They may be shy about many things, but they don't seem to be shy about pointing out to me when I am playing school with them. It has forced me to keep on my toes, forcing me into a constant dependency on going back to the standards. It has forced me to focus on something other than making sure I cover the necessary chapters before the end of the term. What is it that these students need to know and be able to do by the end of the semester, and how do I get each of them to that point and beyond?

Conclusion: Have a Great Life, and Learn a Lot!

How do we know we are succeeding at East High? I am always amazed at the impact of the "little" things that happen in a school. Each day after the first tardy bell, I get on the PA and give a short morning greeting to students and staff. My usual formula is the greeting, a brief mention of anything special happening in school that day, a quote for the day from a respected historical figure, the "Question for a Buck" and finally, I close with "Have a great day -- and learn a lot." Although I have had many comments about that closing, its importance to the students was brought home to me at the end of the first year. In lieu of an outside speaker, the seniors had asked me to give their commencement address. They had only one request. At the end of my remarks, they asked me to close with the line: "Have a great life . . . and learn a lot!" At that point I knew they had listened, knew that to some degree they had captured the faculty's expectation that they would become lifelong learners.

Can we replace the known metaphor of school with another? Can we somehow escape the maddening frustration of waking up every fall to the same scenario with student failure and teacher burnout hiding just around the corner? Not if we keep playing the game the way we've always played it. Not if we content ourselves with the notion that there is no alternative that can truly change the chances for student success. Not if we keep concentrating on what teachers should cover, instead of what students should know and be able to do. I've always been an optimist; I've always known there is a better way to do things. Come on in, rearrange the desks, and focus on what students should achieve. Let's change the game.

Challenges of Improving Instruction: A View from the Classroom

by Deborah Loewenberg Ball and David K. Cohen
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Reformers hold high hopes for improving students' opportunities to learn. Exhortations abound for goals that do not sacrifice concern for fundamental skills but that also emphasize capacities for reasoning, original creation, complex application, and problem solving. Although the details and the rhetoric vary, the frameworks, materials, and assessments with which teachers must contend encompass an ambitious set of aims. Teachers are to work toward these complex aims with all their students, across a range of subject matters: Elementary teachers, for instance, may work with students whose achievement spans several grade levels, whose experience differs widely, and in subjects as different as mathematics, reading, and social studies. Teachers must develop practices more varied and more complex than those of their own school experience, and also likely different from their current professional practice. They must do so with materials that often under-support the goals toward which they are to work, in the face of assessments that are weakly aligned with materials and goals, and without adequate opportunities to learn – either on their own, with colleagues, or in sustained and focused forms of professional development.

We have been investigating challenges of teaching toward more ambitious goals along two main avenues. One is through our investigation of others' efforts to change and improve teaching and to observe challenges endemic to those efforts. A second is through Ball's continuing to teach children herself and to use that teaching as a site for uncovering and articulating recurrent problems of practice that teachers encounter and which they must address.

Instruction and the Environments of Instruction

We use the term **instruction** to refer to the *interactions among teachers and students around educational material.*[1] Rather than seeing instruction as something the teacher does, or curriculum as resident in books and standards, or students as recipients of teachers' and books' opportunities and inputs, we see what happens in classrooms as a function of the interaction among these elements in instructional environments.

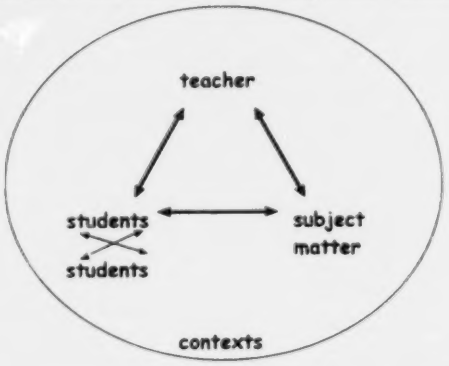

Figure 1. The Dynamics of Instruction[2]

[1] Cohen, D.K. and D.L. Ball (1999). *Instruction, Capacity and Improvement* (CPRE Research Report No. RR-043) Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

[2] Many people have used this triangle to represent relations in and around teaching and learning, including David Hawkins and Magdalene Lampert. See, for example, Hawkins, D. (1974). Nature, man, and mathematics. In *The informed vision: Essays on learning and human nature* (pp. 109-131). New York: Agathon. (Original work published in 1972.)

Teachers' intellectual and personal resources influence instructional interactions by shaping how teachers apprehend, interpret, and respond to materials and students. There is considerable evidence that teachers vary in their ability to notice, interpret, and adapt to differences among students. Important teacher resources in this connection include their conceptions of knowledge, understanding of content and flexibility of understanding, awareness of and familiarity with students' knowledge, ability to relate to, interact with, and learn about students, repertoire of means to represent and extend knowledge and to establish classroom environments. All these resources mediate how teachers shape instruction. Consequently, teachers' opportunities to develop and extend their knowledge and capabilities can considerably affect instruction by affecting how well teachers can make use of students and materials.

Most discussion of instruction and its improvement focuses on teachers, but much research shows that **students'** experiences, understandings, interests, commitments, and engagement are also crucial to instructional capacity. One way to consider the matter is that the resources that students bring influence what teachers can accomplish. Students bring experience, prior knowledge, and habits of mind, and these influence how they apprehend, interpret, and respond to materials and teachers. The same assignment used by the same teacher can produce different instruction with one group of students than with another. Students – and interactions among students – shape the resources for their own learning. At the same time, what students "bring" is also interactive with what they are asked to do, what the teacher pays attention to, and how she or he interprets the student.

By **materials** we mean what students are engaged in, as presented in texts and other media, as well as in problems, tasks, and questions posed to students by teachers or assessments. Instructional materials can mediate students' engagement with the content to be learned, though sometimes the materials themselves are what is to be learned. They can be thought of as the material (as opposed to social) technologies of instruction, including print, video, and computer-based multi-media.

Students' and teachers' interactions with curriculum material comprise the enacted curriculum – as opposed to the intended curriculum as envisioned by curriculum designers.[3] Materials influence instructional capacity by constraining or enabling students' and teachers' opportunities to learn and teach. Teachers' interpretations and use of materials affect what students have to work with and, similarly, students' understanding and use of what teachers offer shapes the tasks which teachers then seek to steer. These interactions are iterative; close tracking reveals how the curriculum evolves interactively and across time.

It follows from this analysis that any given element of instruction shapes instruction by the way it interacts with and influences the other elements. Although reformers often seem to behave as though introducing new materials or training teachers would change instruction, our argument would suggest that changing any single element of instruction would affect instruction only as a function of how it affected interactions among the elements. For example, curriculum materials might be designed with complex tasks of a kind that teachers rarely assign their students. Following the new book, a teacher might assign such tasks, and her students might produce work unlike any she had seen them produce before. If this happened over a period of time, and if she noticed this and considered the implications of what she was seeing, she might begin to revise her ideas about the capabilities of her students. As she did, she might be more inclined to press them to do more difficult work. As she did this, students' opportunities to learn would be enhanced. On this example, the interaction of curriculum, students, and the teacher might lead to changes in instruction. This is perhaps implicit in the hopes of reformers, although some curriculum reformers may assume that if the work that students encounter in their books changes, their learning will necessarily change as well. However, another scenario is at least equally likely. Using a new textbook that offers open-ended and complex problems as the core of the mathematics curriculum, a teacher who knew little mathematics might assign the work without fully appreciating where it would or could lead. When her students got stuck or

[3]Doyle (1984) highlights the importance of distinguishing the "enacted curriculum" as it is constructed by teachers and students.

became confused, she might reduce the complexity and ambiguity of the work by explaining, bounding, making decisions for and with students. When her students came up with significant mathematical insights, she might not notice or know how to use their ideas. Through these sorts of interactions, as the teacher works with the new text, intellectually challenging material might be reconstituted in quite conventional form.[4]

Instruction is situated in the broader contexts that we call the **instructional environment**. Teachers and students work together in schools, which are located in often diverse communities, local and state policy contexts, and subject to a flurry of guidance and aspirations for student performance. Four points are important here.

First, rather than seeing each of these as separately influential on instruction, the range of "external" (to classrooms) signals, values, ideas, and guidance interact with one another as they are perceived and interpreted by teachers and students. When the principal announces that the district's reading program needs to be updated to meet the new state framework for language arts, a teacher may elect to attend a workshop on getting parents to read with their children. Whatever she hears there will be mixed with her principal's interpretation of the district's agenda and with various interpretations of the language arts framework. Echoes of these, in unpredictable combination, may enter her thinking as she teaches reading or plans her next unit.

Second, we do not draw a line at the classroom door between what are often seen as "external" and "internal" to instruction, for the environments of instruction permeate interactions among teachers, students, and materials. Instructional policies, parental attitudes, community values, administrators' and districts' priorities influence instruction as teachers perceive, interpret, and respond to them. For example, if parents criticize the new math homework that their children bring home, saying it is not math, too easy (or too hard, incomprehensible, or beside the point), this can affect students' attitudes toward the work as well as their ability to do it. Students, worried about impending placement exams, may press their teachers to move faster, make work more algorithmic, or reduce complexity. Influences often thought to come from "outside" (parents, high-stakes tests) can be seen as inside interactions among teachers, students, and materials; they shape instruction as they suffuse the interactions.

Third, which external influences do suffuse the interactions has, in part, to do with how individual teachers and students perceive, interpret, and respond to them. Two teachers teaching in adjacent classrooms may differ dramatically in their perception of the school's principal, parents, or the district's instructional policies.

Finally, schools differ in how much they regulate these influences. A good deal depends on how they buffer teachers from outside signals. Some schools are very porous, allowing influences to permeate classroom interactions subject to teachers' individual perceptions. In others, strong leadership or a common strong program may filter the flow of messages and guidance.

Four Challenges of Practice and Improving Practice

Given these ways of thinking about instruction and the environment, we turn now to consider four challenges of practice that bear both on practice and on improving practice. These challenges are not intended to be exhaustive, but are arguably crucial for efforts to develop instruction in ways that would improve students' opportunities to learn and their learning.

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[4] Stein, M. K. Grover, B., and Henningsen, M. (1996). Building student capacity for mathematical thinking and reasoning: An analysis of mathematical tasks used in reform classrooms. *American Educational Research Journal, 33*, 455-488.

1. Knowing and using knowledge in instruction[5]

That teachers' own knowledge of the subject affects what they teach and how they teach it seems so obvious as to be trivial. However, the empirical support for this "obvious" fact has been surprisingly elusive. For example, teachers' mathematical knowledge has shown weak and, more often, no effects on student performance. In a well-known meta-analysis of studies of teacher effects, for example, the number of credits in mathematics beginning at calculus was shown to have positive main effects in only 10 percent of the cases, and, perhaps more jolting, had negative main effects in 8 percent.[6] Perhaps higher level mathematics makes little difference in practice, but more likely this is a problem of measurement: Course-taking is not a good proxy for knowledge. Still, there remain unexamined questions regarding how content knowledge matters to good teaching, and the field's lack of understanding plagues policy about professional preparation and certification, teacher education, and weakens research on teaching and teacher learning.

We have turned the question of what content teachers need to know on its head: instead of asking what do teachers need to know, we ask, "What is teaching, and what does it take to teach?" We examine mathematics teaching and consider the mathematics entailed in its specific activities. What mathematics do teachers use – or might they use – to prepare for class, to follow or depart from their textbooks, to set tasks for students, to conduct class, to evaluate students' work, to figure out next steps? What is the mathematical knowledge, what are the mathematical skills or sensibilities that do – or could – play a role in helping students learn mathematics? We seek to analyze mathematics as used in teaching mathematics, as one might analyze mathematics as used by engineers, biologists, nurses, or tailors.

Even if we can offer more grounded ideas about the specific content that teachers need to know, the important question is not just <u>what</u> teachers need to know about the subjects they teach, but how they use content knowledge in teaching. Take, for example, figuring out what students understand and what they are learning, sizing up an activity in the textbook and revising it to make it work more effectively, or managing a classroom discussion toward a set of goals. Each of these depends on the ways in which the teacher can flexibly bring to bear her own understanding of the content.

Consider the following vignette from Ball's third grade classroom, in which she was trying to use mathematical knowledge to figure out what students were thinking and trying to decide whether or not to pursue either of their ideas. In our view, her work in this fragment of instruction depended not just on <u>what</u> Ball knew, but on her ability to make <u>use</u> of what she knows in these typical and yet challenging pedagogical contexts.

The example arises from a day in Ball's third grade class. She had planned to have the students work further on a set of ideas which they had generated about even and odd numbers. After working on several problems that involved patterns of sums, they had noticed that even numbers added to other evens seemed to always equal even numbers, and that evens added to odds equaled odds, and so on. Not only were these important ideas, but the fact that they had come up with these conjectures was exciting, and their enthusiasm for figuring out whether these were always true made Ball realize that they were learning some things about mathematical work. She thought that they might be able to figure out how one might actually <u>prove</u> that these conjectures were true, going beyond simply giving examples of them.

Near the beginning of the lesson the class was revisiting some discussion they had had the day before about the number zero. A boy named Nathan said~:

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[5] We draw here from Ball's work with Hyman Bass. See, for example, Ball, D. L. (1999). Crossing boundaries to examine the mathematics entailed in elementary teaching. In T. Lam, (Ed.), *Contemporary Mathematics*. Providence: American Mathematical Society; Ball, D. L. and Bass, H. (in press). Making believe: The collective construction of common knowledge in the elementary classroom. In D. Phillips (Ed.), Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, *Constructivism in education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[6] Begle, E. (1979). *Critical variables in mathematics education: Findings from a survey of the empirical literature*. Washington, D.C.: Mathematical Association of America and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

~ Data from transcript of Deborah Ball's third grade class on January 19, 1990.

> Um, first I said that um, zero was even but then I guess I revised so that zero, I think, is special because um, I – um, even numbers, like they, they *make* even numbers; like two, um, two makes four, and four is an even number; and four makes eight; eight is an even number; and um, like that. And, and go on like that and like one plus one and go on adding the same numbers with the same numbers. And so I, I think zero's special.

Ball did not quite understand. What was he saying? Was he saying that two even numbers when added together yield even sums? Was he talking about powers of two? What did he mean that zero was "special?"

Knowing some possible interpretations of Nathan's comment is helpful. But even if one can figure out on the fly what he might be saying, knowing what to ask next or whether it is important to ask something next is far from obvious.

Seeking insight, she asked Nathan:

> Can I ask you a question about what you just said? Were you saying that when you put even numbers together, you get another even number – or were you saying that all even numbers are made up of even numbers?

He assented: "Yeah, they are." What did he mean? Was that what he is saying, that all even numbers are "made up of even numbers?" Ball still was not sure what he was thinking.

A moment later, Betsy disagreed with what she thought Nathan was saying, pointing out the number 6. And then Sean joined in, saying that, "Six is two odd numbers to make an even, to make an even number." Betsy agreed. Nathan, pondering this, continued to try to express his idea:

> I know that, but um, um I'm talking about like two plus two is four, and four plus four is eight and I just skipped the six so I just added the ones that, that add. Like the two plus two is four, and four is an even number and I'm just talking about the things that um, like what I just said – the, um, two plus two is four and four plus four is eight . . . "

Betsy interrupted asking:

> So what you're doing is you're going by twos and then what two equals from then you go from – all the way up?

Nathan: Yeah, I'm not going by every single number like two, four, six, eight.

At this point, Ball still wasn't sure what he was saying, and with a roomful of students, she decided to continue on with the lesson and not pursue his idea further just then. Ball thought it likely that he was noticing something interesting. But she did not think she could take up more class time right then, when it was not clear what he was actually saying and she was unsure how to probe it further in productive ways at that moment. Her simultaneous commitments to the integrity of mathematics as a discipline, to taking students' ideas seriously, and to working effectively as a collective interacted and jostled her thinking as she deliberated about what to do. On one hand, the mathematical ideas that Nathan was contemplating were potentially significant. On the other hand, one individual student was still struggling to bring his ideas to the surface, and the ideas were not in a form that would make them accessible even to the teacher, much less to

his classmates, without considerable work. Each of these commitments – to subject matter, to students, and to intellectually collective work – is worthy, and yet what it means to work in ways that are shaped by these commitments is often quite abstract. This example helps to illuminate their interaction in the small yet significant moments out of which teachers construct practice.

Listening to students or interpreting their papers requires more than willingness. Was this moment with Nathan and his classmates worth pursuing? Why or why not? Was Nathan perhaps confused about something important? Was he on the brink of an important mathematical insight? Was this worth pursuing right now, given that none of this was on the explicit agenda of her lesson? These and other questions flew through Ball's mind even as she decided to move on, with some regrets. Moments later, Sean, still pondering what he had heard, said that he had been "thinking about the number six" and that it could be an odd and an even number:

> 'Cause there could be two, four, six, and two, three twos, that'd make six. And two *threes*, that it could be an odd *and* an *even* number. Both. *Three* things to make it and there could be *two* things to make it.

When Ball heard him, she thought at first that he was building on what Nathan had been saying. She thought that he might have been thinking that Nathan had been thinking that all even numbers were made up of two even numbers, and Sean wanted to point out that some even numbers – six, for instance – were made up of two odd numbers. She tried to explain that Nathan had not been claiming that, and Nathan agreed. However, Sean's claim that "six could be even or it could be odd" roused the other students. Cassandra said she disagreed with Sean. She went to the board and, using a pointer on the number line, showed that if he called six an even number, then, by extension, zero would have to be odd, which they all knew not to be the case: "Zero's not an odd number," she asserted firmly.

Sean persisted:

> Because six, because there can be three of something to make six, and three of something is like *odd*, like see, um, you can make two, four, six. Three twos to make that and two threes make six.

"That doesn't necessarily mean that six is *odd*," Keith pointed out. Other students nodded. "Just because two odd numbers add up to an even number doesn't mean it has to be odd."

The students were growing increasingly invested in this discussion, and this still was not what she had planned to do in class that day.[8] Deciding what to do is complex. Ball had goals and a lesson plan, but seizing "teachable moments" is also important. But was this one of those moments? How does one know? And if it were, what was it that a teacher might do to take advantage of it? If it were not such a moment, why not, and what might a teacher do to put it aside? What were Nathan, Sean, Betsy, Keith, and Cassandra doing? What was going on with the children who were not contributing to this discussion?

In this vignette, the teacher's sense of what was at play depended both on her own understanding of mathematics and her ability to use that knowledge to hear and interpret her students. Was what Sean was saying a sign of flawed understanding of even and odd numbers? Or was his idea an interesting mathematical insight? What should she ask or do next? These and the myriad other pedagogical decisions that teachers face depend on what they know about the content, as well as how they are able to use that understanding in

[8] This episode is analyzed in detail in Ball, D. L. (1993). With an eye on the mathematical horizon: Dilemmas of teaching elementary school mathematics. *Elementary School Journal*, 93(4), 373-397.

the context of their work to understand their students, steer the course of students' engagement, determine next steps, and figure out where to stop and where to head.

On this account, the challenges of using content knowledge interact with and extend beyond knowledge of content. One teacher's interactions with a class of fifth graders, for example, may produce different work than those of a colleague who works with the same class, if the first teacher is more adept at evoking and making use of students' ideas. This means that speaking in terms of what teachers or students "bring" to interactions may be misleading, since what students and teachers bring may be used to better or worse advantage by others. In discussing what students bring to a task it is important to recognize that it depends in part on what teachers can see and use in students. One reason that different teachers elicit different responses and work from the same students is that what teachers know, believe, and can do shape their perceptions of what students bring, the opportunities they subsequently extend to students, and their interpretations of students' ensuing work.

Similarly, materials both depend on their use by students and teachers and affect such use. From one perspective, the use of reading materials would be shaped by the nature of the text they offer students and the approaches used to develop students' reading, comprehension, and interpretation. From another perspective, materials are shaped by students' ideas and experiences and how they approach and interpret them.

But here we can see teachers' unique position in shaping what goes on in instruction. Teachers' knowledge, experience, and skills affect the interactions of students and materials in ways that neither students nor materials can. That is, because teachers mediate instruction their interpretation of educational materials affects curriculum potential and use, and their understanding of students affects students' opportunities to learn.

As teachers learn new things about content and students, they notice different things about both and are able to use them differently. Change in students, teachers, or materials has the potential to change the relations of teachers, students, and materials, and hence affect instructional capacity. But change in teachers has unique potential, because teachers mediate all relationships within instruction.

As teachers mediate those relationships, they must manage three central problems: coordinating instruction, creating incentives for performance, and learning in practice.

2. Managing coordination of instruction

Effective instruction requires complex coordination: Teachers, students, and material interact in context and over time. Many threats to coordination of these elements exist. Teachers may misinterpret or mispredict their students; the test may align poorly with the textbook. Different teachers working with the same student may provide different guidance, confusing the student. Students move, teachers change assignments, new frameworks emerge, and district leadership is fickle. The potential for fragmentation, disconnection, and discontinuity is high.

Some threats to coordination derive from the fundamental nature of instruction, requiring interactions among teachers, students, and materials each developed with perspectives and purposes, and not at all necessarily in tune. For instance, a teacher comes to class with an agenda about what she wants students to do and learn – as Ball did in the vignette earlier in this paper. She gets her students to work on a task, but as she discusses it with individual students, she sees that they are thinking about it differently. They raise questions, which bear on their learning the topic she had in mind. What does a teacher do to coordinate between her students' ideas and her agenda? If she stops to take full account of their thinking, she risks losing her agenda and getting off track. If she listens to them, and then proceeds on with her own plans, she may leave them confused. Coordinating between a teacher's goals and students' actual understanding is never easy. Lectures may appear to be a way of managing the problem of coordinating between the agenda for the class and students' unanticipated ideas or questions, for in this mode, teachers can maintain their agenda more reliably. However, maintaining the agenda may not produce better learning. Later, when students do

the homework or take a quiz, the disconnection between what they understood and what the teacher *intended can reemerge and become significant.*

Some examples are internal to the development of a topic. Take, for example, a teacher teaching second graders to subtract with regrouping ("borrowing"). She uses bundled popsicle sticks, base ten blocks, pictures in the children's books, the metaphors of "trading," "bundling," and "unbundling," and she helps them record problems in standard written symbolic form. Often teachers use these sequentially, such that one succeeds the other, as students "graduate" to the "real" (symbolic) form. Without substantial effort and attention to connections, however, these different representations may each exist discretely in students' understanding. The mapping of one on each of the others is critical if students are to develop integrated understanding and skill in mathematics.

Other examples derive from the structures of schooling. One is coordinating learning over time, given the extreme fragmentation of American schooling. Classes are interrupted constantly, special events disrupt the regular academic schedule a remarkable amount of the time, and schooling halts for two days every week and for over three months each summer. Subjects are taught either in 50-minute periods or in fragments across an "integrated" unit; coordinating the development of ideas across time blocks is no small challenge. Still another – perhaps more commonplace in the contemporary policy discourse – is the challenge of "alignment" among the many sources of guidance for instruction: frameworks, district goals and objectives, textbooks, standardized tests, state assessments.

The problem of coordination often is exacerbated when reformers seek to make instruction more intellectually challenging. The variance in curricular guidance increases if extant guidance is not dropped, alignment becomes still fuzzier, and complex ideas may require longer, less interrupted time to develop. Moreover, as students are asked to work with more open-ended problems and tasks, write and talk more, their ideas will be more diverse and less predictable to their teachers. Mediating among students' different ways of thinking and between theirs and the teacher's own assumptions and knowledge is still more complex.

Environments can reduce or increase the threats to coordination by the ways in which they buffer or amplify multiple messages about instruction, by the ways in which schooling and school schedules are structured, by the numbers of people who work with students and how much they communicate with one another. The kinds and availability of information about students and the uses to which such information is put can make a difference in the coordination of instruction. For example, when teachers work together to examine student performance data to consider individual and group patterns or anomalies, when they work to calibrate instruction with such information about students, or when teachers' opportunities to learn are aligned with areas of special focus, their decisions can be more closely coordinated with information about students.

3. Creating incentives for high quality instruction

Incentives for performance are mixed. Since teachers' success depends on that of their students, there are significant disincentives to make students' academic work difficult, to push students, and to probe deeply to see if they have learned. But there are also incentives for students to press teachers to reduce the challenge of the work. If the work is clear and students do not become stuck, and if there is sufficient constraint such that they are shaped to get the work "right," then both teachers and students will look successful.

Consider that the principal way for teachers to succeed is for their students to succeed.[9] A major complication, however, is that there are different ways to define success in classrooms, some of which are more complex, difficult and risky to attain, and others of which are easier. Teachers face competing

[9] Dan Lortie wrote two decades ago about the "psychic rewards of teaching," pointing to the dependence that teachers have on their students for their sense of professional achievement. See Lortie, D. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

incentives to reduce the complexity of students' work, on one hand, and to hold a high bar for challenging engagement, on the other. Helping students to get "right answers" and do neat, clear work is a reasonable wish. When such work is valued, it makes students and parents pleased and proud, and creates a sense of accomplishment and confidence. Pressing students to engage in complex, more ambiguous work is often less appealing. There is a greater chance that their work will fall short or be quite varied. Students may fail, feel frustrated, never finish, and not learn. Parents may complain.

The irony is this: Teachers who structure students' work so that the space for working is constrained can increase the chances that they will get "right answers," but what they have accomplished is perhaps less major in terms of learning. Teachers who make more complex work for students do aim at more ambitious outcomes, but may be increasing their risks of attaining those with their students.

The problem of incentives is exacerbated by reforms that aim at intellectually complex instruction. As standards for performance are raised, teachers must work to reach these standards with their students in order to be successful, or have a way of explaining why their students were not capable of attaining the goals. The risks are great, and some teachers manage this problem by blaming students for their lack of attainment or pointing the finger at parents, community, and environmental factors.

4. Learning in and from practice

Improvement of instruction depends not only on using knowledge well, managing coordination, and creating incentives for high quality instruction. It depends also on learning, and, in particular, on teachers' ability to learn in and from practice. Instruction occurs in particulars – particular students interacting with particular teachers over particular ideas in particular circumstances. Despite the significance of the knowledge that we discuss above, no amount of such knowledge can fully prescribe appropriate or wise practice. No matter how well-coordinated are the signals, elements, and environments of instruction, nor how smartly conceived and supported the incentives, high quality instruction depends on teachers who are skillful at learning in and from practice. Teaching requires improvisation, conjecturing, experimenting, and assessing. Teachers must be able to adapt to contexts and develop practice in response to specific events.

Learning and teaching about practice in practice does not imply either that teachers must become researchers or that the only way to improve one's teaching is in the context of one's own classroom. Instead, a range of contexts of practice can serve as sites for learning.[10] How, for example, might teachers be helped to develop usable knowledge of content by studying videotapes of classroom lessons, or examining children's ideas or written work? How might working closely with new curriculum materials and experimenting with their use across several classrooms, in collaboration with other teachers, help to develop knowledge of content and of typical ways in which students respond to that content? How might records of practice be studied by teachers, alone or with others, and what sorts of learning are possible through different sorts of study? These and other examples illustrate what might be meant by learning in and from practice and reveal the importance of developing ways to use practice as a medium for more grounded opportunities to learn that facilitate both the development of usable knowledge as well as knowledge about knowledge use itself, in context.

Take, for example, the brief vignette in this paper. Closer study of what Nathan is saying, viewing the tape, and considering what other students had been saying would offer rich opportunities to learn to hear children mathematically. What guesses might we make about what is shaping Nathan's thinking? What evidence is there that he might be thinking intuitively about powers of two? What is there to understand about powers of two and what might one ask Nathan, or his classmates, if one wanted to open this up,

[10] Our ideas here grow from Ball's collaborations each with Magdalene Lampert and Hyman Bass. In addition to other references cited here, see Lampert, M. & Ball, D. L. (1998). *Mathematics, teaching, and multimedia: Investigations of real practice.* New York: Teachers College Press. Many others are also working on related approaches, including, in mathematics, Deborah Schifter, Nanette Seago and Judy Mumme, Carne Barnett, Margaret Smith, Mary Kay Stein, and Ed Silver.

beginning with his observation? How might one sensitively table his idea in ways that respect his initiative and yet permit it to be tabled for now? Such professional analysis and inquiry, focused closely on one small episode from one classroom, could be effectively used as a site for teachers to work on a set of important mathematical ideas, to develop skills at hearing and interpreting students, expanding a repertoire of how to respond to students' ideas, and designing strategies for contending with recurrent problems of practice.

Another promising avenue is the deliberate use of textbooks and other curriculum materials as sources for teachers' – not just students' – learning.[11] Teachers' guides might be written, read, and used to provide a kind of guidance for instruction that is uniquely possible because of the dailyness of curriculum use. Teachers who study lessons and experiment with the use of new curricula in their classrooms may hear and see their students doing things that they had not realized they could. Curricular materials could function to offer support and guidance as teachers venture into new curricular and pedagogical territory, in ways that prior efforts at "teacher-proof" materials ironically missed.

We have much to consider if we were to take seriously the need to develop ways to learn in and from practice. Opportunities for learning that disconnect content from students, knowledge from practice, curriculum from teaching, leave worrisomely to chance the possibility of developing the sort of resources crucial for instruction and its improvement.

Challenges for Improving Instruction

Three conclusions are worth highlighting from this discussion of instruction and central challenges of practice. First, problems inherent in instruction are also problems for its improvement. Using knowledge, having opportunities to learn in and from practice, coordinating among a host of fragmented and disconnected parts, and responding to incentives are all central problems of instruction; they are also challenges with which those who seek to improve instruction must contend. Efforts to improve instruction that do not take these problems into account are likely to misfire, for they leave teachers and others on their own to contend with these central challenges of practice. For example, providing teachers with new knowledge of content or students with new materials, but failing to consider the challenges of <u>using knowledge</u> in practice is less likely to impact what teachers can do. Exciting teachers with new images of instruction but neglecting to consider all the disincentives for such work are similarly likely to fall short.

Second, improvement and support efforts that do not design to work directly on instruction are much more chancy than those that do. It is astonishing to see how often initiatives aimed supposedly at the improvement of instruction focus on everything other than instruction: on recruitment, incentives, restructuring, time. Instruction is a complex set of relations and entails complicated practices. Given its complexity, creating structures for teachers to talk with one another <u>may</u> help them develop crucial resources for the improvement of instruction, but it may not. Whether or not time or structures or resources make a difference for instruction depends on how these are perceived and used. Raising teachers' salaries or recruiting different people into teaching <u>may</u> affect instruction, but there is no special reason why these strategies would, for no automatic link exists between these avenues and the quality of instruction. Without a focus on the very elements and their interactions that constitute instruction it should not be surprising if efforts at improvement fall short. Such strategies create possibilities, but it is in how these are used that

[11] Ball, D. L. & Cohen, D. K. (1996). Reform by the book: what is -- or might be -- the role of curriculum materials in teacher learning and instructional reform? *Educational Researcher*, 25, 6 - 8, 14.

makes the difference. No guarantees follow from creating such possibilities, and in fact, evidence suggests that they disappoint more often than succeed.

Third, improving instruction depends on understanding the connections between classrooms and their environments. Designing approaches to improvement that take seriously the ways in which the external environment permeates the minute-to-minute interactions of instruction are more likely to impact instruction than those that ignore the role of environments. This implies that opportunities to learn that leave to chance how teachers can make use of such learning in the contexts of their work are less likely to be helpful than those that situate opportunities for learning in practice and take account of the environments in which practice is itself situated.

Finishing the Race: A District Perspective of Standards-Based Reform

by Vicki L. Phillips
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What is the single greatest threat to public education today? Ask any number of educators this question, and they are likely to give you some answer about voucher programs and charter schools. But ask me, and I will tell you something very different. I will tell you that the single greatest threat is *us*, the education professionals, and our persistent tendency in this country to undermine reforms just as they gain momentum. You have only to pick up a copy of *Education Week* to find that the standards movement is the latest subject of hot debate.

Perhaps I should declare my position from the outset. I am currently the superintendent of a struggling urban school district. For more than a decade I have been involved in the implementation of standards-based reform from the school to the international level including the reforms in Kentucky and Philadelphia. The reflections in this paper are born not from theory, but from practice.

This paper is designed to provide a springboard for discussion of standards-based reform at the district level. It is written in two parts. In Part One, I seek to extend the conversation about standards-based reform well beyond the triad of standards, assessment, and accountability to include what I call essential supports. In Part Two, I provide my version of a few indispensable strategies for implementing radical reform in struggling areas. I also examine the challenges of doing so against the backdrop of a national debate that seems to be more about posturing than about producing results for children.

But first a few preliminary observations. To say that this country has always been interested in education is an understatement. At different times public interest and commitment have waxed and waned along with public opinion. But education has never been far from the top of our nation's agenda. The commitment of educators to improve our schools has also waxed and waned. During periods in which the public spotlight was focused elsewhere, we in public education became complacent, seemingly content with the status quo, and, as a whole, agonizingly unaware of the effects that a rapidly changing society should have on our practice in classrooms and schools.

Yet, during those times when the spotlight fell directly on us and public interest was high, our typical response was to launch a new set of promising, but isolated, initiatives – a new form of school or district governance, a new organization structure, a new curriculum framework, or a new set of instructional techniques. Like viruses, we hoped that those initiatives would catch hold and spread. It was the "trickle down theory" of education reform, and like "trickle down" economics, it was just as ineffective. Time and again we were disappointed that such initiatives had little or no impact on student achievement.

As we approach the millennium, we find the spotlight focused squarely on us again. Many educators and citizens believe that our system of public education needs extensive repair work; others believe it is broken beyond fixing. And this time, the new, "promising" initiatives on the scene are standards-based reform, voucher programs, and charter schools.

There is the good news. For instance, we have at last acknowledged that the isolated initiatives of the past will not work. Nothing less than a comprehensive approach is required to improve our schools. And then there is the bad news. Among other things, educators and citizens are drawing lines and choosing sides. I, for one, am less concerned about the current conversation regarding vouchers than I am about the rapid polarization of the conversations about standards and the standards movement. Given our past track record, we may soon have rival camps of bitter enemies who can no longer conduct constructive conversations.

In education in this country our tendency is to tear down rather than to build up. Or rather, join up. By "joining up," I do not mean a compromise or a result that is less than the sum of its parts. Instead, I mean a melding together of the best to produce a result that is more powerful than the sum of the parts. If

we learned nothing else from the so-called "reading wars" (whole language versus phonics), we should have learned this. And yet, as I go about my work, I read or listen to the latest debates in frustration and disappointment. For example, I read that improved student achievement "really means" that we have lowered our standards. Or I read that the standards movement robs teachers of their creativity and turns children into passive receivers of facts. Or I hear that accountability undermines educational excellence (whatever that means). The list of such claims – some with merit, but most without - goes on and on.

Those who have the magic answer should put it on the table. For my part, I believe that there is no magic answer. Any educational program or practice can be poorly used or badly implemented, including standards-based reform. But the current standards movement represents a unique opportunity *precisely* because at its core is a strong commitment to results for all of our students. Rarely has a reform effort been so clear about its purpose or gained momentum so quickly. Forty-eight states have adopted academic standards and many states, districts, and schools have started to put the supports in place to address crucial needs in public education, including improved teaching.

So why are some so keen to undermine this momentum so quickly? Why risk stifling a promising opportunity for significant and lasting change in public education? I understand the tough issues at the core of the debate, and I worry about them, too. But I also know from firsthand experience that clear, high, measurable standards can provide a framework for teaching and learning that is richer, deeper, more rigorous, and more accessible to all students than ever before. Our children would be better served if we worked together to ensure that the promise of standards bears fruit, and not our fears. The answer is not to throw out the best tool that is at hand, but rather to help states, districts, and schools use that tool wisely and well.

In part, we can be wiser about standards-based reform by broadening our perspective of what constitutes the standards movement. While most often the triad of standards, assessment, and accountability is used to describe the standards movement, they are only part of the story. I doubt that reformers in Kentucky, Philadelphia, District #2 in New York, El Paso, Cincinnati, Boston, Maryland, and a host of other places would stop there in their description of standards-based reform. Reformers in these places would talk about standards, assessment, and accountability as only three components of an integrated effort to create entire systems of good schools. Part One extends the discussion of the components beyond standards, assessment, and accountability; Part Two addresses their implementation.

Part One:
Beyond Standards, Assessment, and Accountability:
Preparing the Track for the Long Run

Whenever I am asked to outline the basics of a standards-based reform, I typically describe two strands of work (see Figure 1). **The first strand involves resetting the conditions within which schools should operate**. Four conditions form this strand: standards, assessment, accountability, and equity of opportunity. **The second strand involves providing the supports** that schools will require if they are to have the best chance of improving student performance. One might think of this work as providing the "toolkit" that schools will need to be successful, the contents of which may vary from place to place.

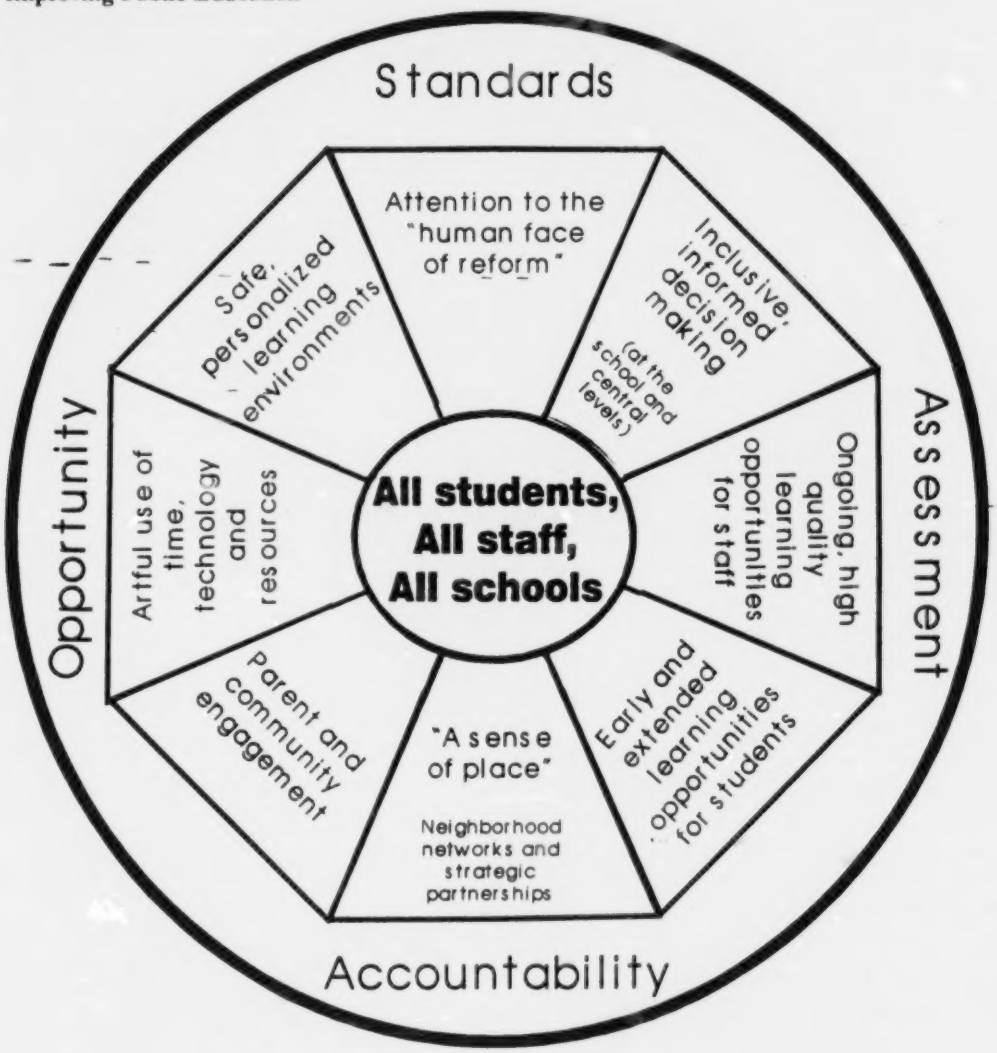
Setting the Conditions

Rigorous academic standards

Not surprisingly, standards-based reform begins with high academic standards. Such standards are clear statements of what students should know and be able to do, and how well they should know and do them. In schools where clear standards and expectations exist, teachers know exactly what students need to learn, what they need to teach, where improvements need to be made, and what they must work on with

colleagues. Well-defined standards promote better results for students and bring focus and coherence to the work of teachers and schools.

Figure 1
Improving Public Education


Standards
Attention to the "human face of reform"
Inclusive, informed decision making
(at the school and central levels)
Safe, personalized learning environments
Ongoing, high quality learning opportunities for staff
Artful use of time, technology and resources
All students, All staff, All schools
Early and extended learning opportunities for students
Parent and community engagement
"A sense of place"
Neighborhood networks and strategic partnerships
Opportunity
Assessment
Accountability

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Performance assessment

Our assessment systems must be sophisticated enough to tell us whether students are achieving the high standards that have been set for them, and our teachers must be "assessment literate" enough to use these results continuously to improve classroom practice.

Ultimately, our measures must provide a far broader view of student abilities than standardized testing alone, and district and state assessments must be robust enough to serve such multiple purposes as informing instruction, holding schools accountable for results, and reporting to the public.

Accountability

As educators, we must be willing to stand up for the results we produce.

In almost every facet of our lives, whether professional or personal, we set goals, measure our progress towards them, and anticipate the consequences of success or failure. Every manager in a company that lives or dies on the efforts of its workers, every athletic coach who sets the bar a notch higher, every parent who sees that his or her child carries out some household task, all recognize that people work (and play) more effectively, efficiently, and with more zest and persistence when they gauge their efforts against a set of anticipated results.

Ultimately, we can claim success only if students leave our schools knowing and being able to do what they must know and do to function effectively as good citizens and productive workers. Old models of accountability may have ensured that the ledger books were in order and they may have tracked how the money was spent. But those systems could not tell us whether the education that was funded with those dollars had any real effect on student achievement. New models for accountability need to be anchored in student results and include rewards for successful schools, intensive assistance for schools that need our help, and consequences for schools that persistently fail to improve.

In addition, we must extend our conversations about accountability beyond educators to include students, parents, and citizens.

Equity of opportunity for all

In the past we have ensured a successful future for many of our schoolchildren, *but never for all of them.* To extend our work to encompass *all* students is the task that faces us now. This is perhaps the most important, and challenging, of these four conditions. To "walk our talk" here will say much about who we are as schools, districts, and communities, and who we will become in the next millennium.

In order to do this we must hold the same high standards for *all* students and believe in the inherent ability of all children to reach them, including those from low-income families, those from racial and language minorities, and those with disabilities and special needs. We must back that belief with purposeful action. All children must have access to a good education regardless of where they live in the community, or in what community they live.

Providing the Supports – The Toolkit

There is too much argument about whether education reform should be *top down* or *bottom up*; whether it should be *centralized* or *decentralized*; whether more emphasis should be placed on *pressure* or *support*. The answer is neither – and both. High expectations call for high supports. Schools and school districts need a clear set of expectations or "conditions" to guide their work *and* a set of tools or "supports" to ensure they have the best possible chance of getting the job done. The tools may vary, but in places where reform is taking hold, the following are often among them:

Inclusive, informed decision-making

Unless parents and, in secondary schools, students participate meaningfully in the life of the school community, schools are unlikely to improve. Nor are schools likely to improve unless teachers help shape the direction of change. Among other things, the use of inclusive decision-making brings additional focus to improving student achievement; ensures that key decisions are made by those who know the students best; facilitates *informed* decision-making; and promotes more effective use of resources.

Ongoing, high-quality learning opportunities for staff

Continuous personal and professional growth are essential if teachers, administrators, and support staff are to stay current in their field, meet the ever-changing needs of students, and remain motivated and energized. This will not happen by chance or by putting the responsibility totally on teachers and administrators. The system (district or state) must provide ongoing opportunities through which teachers can retain their professional edge and be personally renewed. By the same token, all staff are under an obligation to take advantage of these opportunities.

As important as other parties are to student learning, the role of the teacher is paramount. It seems odd to have to emphasize this, but this basic truth is often overlooked these days. In the final analysis, it is the quality of the interaction between teacher and learner that determines when, how, and how well learning occurs. Teachers must have access to ongoing, high-quality professional development to ensure that they are:

- ***intimately familiar with the content area*** (e.g., mathematics, science) that they are to teach and are up-to-date about changes and growth in the body of knowledge.
- ***adept at using differentiated instructional strategies*** that are reflective of their students' learning styles and historical/cultural orientations.
- ***assessment literate*** (i.e., adept at assessing student learning), so that they accurately gauge how well students have learned and use that knowledge to adjust instructional practice.
- ***able regularly to share proven approaches with their colleagues and receive advice and coaching*** on how to enhance their effectiveness.

Early and extended learning opportunities for students

For all students to meet rigorous academic standards many of them need to start earlier and many need additional time and support. Preschool youngsters can be helped by quality child development experiences before they begin formal schooling. Five-year olds can benefit from full-day programs. Extra instructional time (e.g., before/after school and during the summer) is the cushion that some students need to be successful. And learning can be accelerated for all students if they are helped to discern connections between what they learn in the classroom and the world and life outside school.

A sense of place

Deep connections should exist between the school and the community in which it is located. Such connections include the development of strategic alliances with parents, business, higher education, and a variety of formal (e.g., health and human services) and informal supports (e.g., communities of faith and civic associations). These alliances help to ensure that children come to school ready to learn and stay on track once they are there.

Community engagement

Many education reforms never take hold or have the opportunity to produce results because the changes themselves, and the reasons for them, have not been well communicated. As a result, they are neither well understood nor widely supported.

Schools and districts must design communication strategies that result in well-informed stakeholders across the board – staff, students, families, and the broader community. This means listening, promoting understanding, and involving all interested and invested groups in the substance of the reform and the challenges and messiness of implementation as well as the celebration of success. In particular, parents and citizens must be helped to become good consumers of the changes in the schools. What can they see, hear, feel, and touch that tells them that the school is headed in the right direction and making substantial progress?

Artful use of time, technology, and resources

In successful schools and school districts the use of time, the deployment of technology, and the allocation of resources can be directly traced to priorities. Holding standards as the constant, schools and districts deliberately explore ways to modify the school day and year, to allow more time for instruction, and to give teachers more time to plan and work together. Successful schools meld new and traditional instructional approaches, invest in appropriate technology, and train their staff in its use. Successful schools take control of their resources, rethink current uses, and exchange ineffective structures and staffing patterns for strategies that are squarely focused on student achievement.

Safe, personalized learning environments

If students are to meet high standards, they must receive instruction in settings that are conducive to good teaching and active learning. Teaching and learning occur best:

- Where students are well-known and where they receive personalized attention from caring adults.
- Where the environment is managed in a disciplined and fair way by confident adults who do not tolerate distracting conduct.
- Where the facilities are clean, safe, and well maintained.
- Where there is support to keep students out of trouble and/or help them through troubled times.

Attention to the "human face of reform"

Ultimately it is the action – or inaction – of people that will guarantee success. Successful schools and school leaders understand this. They work to build trust in, and commitment to, their goals and strategies among those who must implement and sustain change. In other words, they bet on people and they endeavor:

- To provide opportunities at every level of the school or district for honest, open conversations about goals, beliefs, and strategies.
- To create the conditions in which trust can flourish (e.g., straightforward sharing of information, support for risk-taking, respect for different perspectives, and soliciting and using feedback).
- To select and retain district and school leaders who are open, caring, competent, communicative, and who have the capacity to instill confidence in staff.
- To provide opportunities for discussion, reflection, and celebration that ignite inspiration and enhance the relationships among staff at all levels.

To cast the standards movement primarily in terms of standards, assessment, and accountability leaves a gaping hole in the fabric of reform and opens us up to a flood of justifiable criticism. To raise standards without also providing the proper supports to get the job done is like changing the racecourse without notifying the competitors, while still expecting them to go for the win. Both strands of work – conditions *and* supports – are necessary to improve the performance of public schools.

Part Two: Running the Race

As I move from a discussion of the components to recommendations for getting the job done, I do so in a particular context. Some of the strategies emerged from my experiences in Kentucky and Philadelphia, but

all are being implemented currently in the School District of Lancaster where I am the Superintendent. So let me begin by setting the scene.

A word about Lancaster

To the surprise of many who think primarily of our Amish neighbors, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is a city not only rich in history but also rich in diversity. Our student population of 11,500 is 43 percent Latino, 32 percent Caucasian, 22 percent African-American, and 3 percent Asian. As our demographics indicate, the School District of Lancaster is a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic community. Many of our families are new to the city from Puerto Rico, Bosnia, Cambodia, and Vietnam, while others have a long history in Lancaster. Although the unemployment rate in Lancaster County is low (3 percent), unemployment rates in some areas of the city are as high as 40 percent. More than 60 percent of our students receive free and reduced lunches (ranging from 35 percent in one school to 98 percent in another). Over 740 of our students have been homeless in the last year; 1 in every 20 girls is pregnant or parenting; and approximately 200 students between the ages of 12 and 17 receive rehabilitation services for drug and alcohol abuse or violent behavior.

We are big enough to have most of the key problems that are associated with urban districts, but we are not yet plagued by some of the more severe stresses that are associated with large city districts. The city and townships that comprise the School District of Lancaster are aggressive in their support of economic and education reform. Thanks to a visionary Board of Directors, our agenda for education reform is far-reaching and comprehensive. Our work is challenging, but it is not impossible.

First things first: Leadership matters

Lancaster has by no means cornered the market on education reform. We are a standards-based, results-oriented school district. While our implementation strategies may be different, a close examination of our reform agenda reveals core components that are similar to those in Part One and to reforms in other places. However, Lancaster is a strong example of what can happen when a District actively seeks to appoint *and* supports a reform-minded superintendent.

In November 1997, the School District of Lancaster placed a half-page advertisement in *Education Week* for the position of Superintendent. At that time, the conceptual framework for standards-based reform was fairly intact in Lancaster. But there was great difficulty in making it work, including a 97 percent vote of no confidence from the teachers' union. The advertisement called for the new superintendent to be *a master at implementation, capable of creating and recreating, cutting new ground and making things run while keeping the present momentum going.* I include a portion of the advertisement below because it answers a key question: What is the role of the superintendent in implementing standards (i.e., standards-based reform)? Or, for that matter, reform of any kind?

If you are tired of education rhetoric leading nowhere, but you passionately want to change K-12, read this:

The Position:
The Superintendent of Lancaster's schools requires all the normal skills any such position calls for, and which appear as boiler plate requirements in every ad in this publication: leadership, fiscal management, communication, staff development, an open managerial style, etc., etc. We don't need to elaborate on them since you already know them.

Instead, please realize that to make the Lancaster schools successful, you would have to:

- Come to Lancaster by choice – because you genuinely prefer to be in a district of broad ethnic and cultural diversity.
- Become deeply committed to the Lancaster reform plan, as you become aware of its scope, understanding it is an emerging, dynamic plan, fraught with new creative problems and unresolved issues.
- Be truly innovative, willing to take risks as the reform plan develops, willing to invite constructive dissent from all stakeholders, confident enough not to have to win every argument, and willing to shift direction when something isn't working, respond to reality and take the heat such shifts always generate.
- Genuinely believe decisions can be make at the building and classroom levels, and deeply believe that teachers, principals and school staff are true allies in the reform effort.
- Have simply outstanding listening skills, including the ability and willingness to hear what is said by stakeholders, and to incorporate what you learn into your message to the community.
- Have extraordinary ability as an external spokesperson. You will have to love the external role if you are going to pull the community and all of its elements together in ongoing support of the reforms.
- Have the ability to speak simply, directly and honestly in language people can understand, rather than in the normal education rhetoric so many reformers seem to love. You must be able to make Lancaster's citizens understand what the new system is doing.
- Be strong enough to lead the thinking of the School Board (since you will be the professional educator) and the senior school team and craft a relationship that unifies them and you. The good news is that this Board does not have a tendency to micro-manage. You will be able to do your job.
- Be confident enough to build effective working teams, beyond the central office staff, involving people who are independent thinkers, and capable of dealing with reality and accepting responsibility.
- Be prepared to see the Lancaster Reform Plan through to success, not merely to the point of implementation, but to the success of students in the system.

This list clearly calls for a person of consequence. If you are one, if you can do these things, and if you are a sufficiently powerful leader, you may find that the Lancaster Schools provide an opportunity to drive change in K-12 that is presently unequalled in the U.S.

(*Education Week*, November 19, 1997)

I would add that it is also the Superintendent's job to understand deeply the components of standards-based reform, and to be able to apply the lessons that have been learned elsewhere to the implementation of reform in this district. Leadership matters.

Well worn, but true: Change is a journey; Key lessons come from the journey

Michael Fullan's often quoted phrase is particularly apt in my case, because my journey through Kentucky, to The National Center on Education and the Economy in Washington, D.C., to Philadelphia, and now to Lancaster (with stopovers in Australia and England) has resulted in a rich array of lessons. And

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because every place is unique and no two paths to education reform are quite the same, I am still learning. Whether viewed from a school, district, or state perspective, this work is incredibly complex and multifaceted – and definitely not for the faint-hearted! I have three suggestions for keeping us focused.

1. ***Set the compass early on and don't waiver.*** In other words, craft a compelling vision and stick to it. It is all too easy for staff to lose sight of the vision as they grapple with the more immediate challenges of implementation. In a time of radical change, the chief task of leadership is to help staff and stakeholders hold fast to the vision while at the same time demonstrating flexibility in implementation. This is what sustains momentum over time. Staff need to know that to make adjustments in the face of the unexpected or the unworkable is not to shift direction, but merely to respond to the ebb and flow of the process. Kentucky is a prime example. The Legislature was clear from the outset that adjustments would have to be made to the reforms as lessons were learned, but it has not waived from its commitment to high standards for all students.
   When I first arrived in Lancaster, the implementation strategies were so rigid that the District was on the verge of losing teacher and community support. I spent a large part of my first year helping the staff and the community hold on to the vision, even as we began to adjust the implementation strategies. We began by constantly asking ourselves a simple question over and over: *What do we need to do more of, better, or differently in order to realize our vision for the School District of Lancaster?* Not only did we come up with some solid answers, we also saw additional benefits: more ownership of work; increased expression of divergent points of view; renewed hope, and a deeper commitment to the journey.

2. ***Begin with gentle pressure, relentlessly applied; over time shift from pressure to patience.*** To be successful in our quest to improve public education, we must find the right balance of pressure and support. Discussions of pressure invariably lead to concerns about high stakes accountability. Most of the time, I subscribe to the notion that even the most compelling reform strategies may not succeed without a strong, well-understood accountability system. But I also think that there are many paths to a given destination. Largely because of the tough lessons I learned in Kentucky and in Philadelphia, I am striving in Lancaster both to increase the external demands on our schools and to help them build a strong internal culture of accountability. Therefore, in Lancaster we have:
   - Worked together (schools and central administration) to create a data-driven culture across the District – a culture in which decisions are based on multiple pieces of information: student, classroom, school and program results; trends and patterns over time; hard and soft indicators; research tempered by the wisdom of practice.
   - Committed ourselves to supporting the adults in the system, but to putting children first when making decisions.
   - Committed ourselves as a leadership team (school principals and central administration) to being a community of learners and to tackling the hard questions.
   - Included in our revised strategic plan six vital signs of progress on which we shall make a public report each year.
   - Included performance targets in reading, writing, and math in each school's improvement plan, and expected schools to present their plans to the Board of Education in a public forum.
   - Adopted new forms of assessment so that teachers have better information on which to base their instruction.
   - Become the first school district in North America to meet business- and industry-accepted standards of quality through ISO 9001.

- Become increasing clear about the capabilities that are required of leaders in the school and central administration and have aggressively recruited new leaders with those attributes as vacancies occur (see our advertisement in *Education Week*, April 1999).

At this point, the question of consequences for persistently poor performance has not been asked or answered. Nonetheless, the energy and focus in the District as we entered this school year are noticeably different from that of last year.

3. ***Of equal importance: serious support, intentionally delivered.*** Teachers in particular are reluctant to embrace standards, assessment, and accountability if they do not believe they will be given the support to do what is being asked of them and their students. And many teachers do not yet believe that significant numbers of students can meet higher standards. These two issues raise interesting questions for Districts. How, and in what order, should districts create the supports that are discussed earlier in this paper, particularly when a district has limited resources? Given that discussion alone is not likely to change the outlook of our teachers, how do we create experiences that foster beliefs that drive actions that produce results?

There is no simple response to the first question. The phasing in of supports depends entirely on what is, or is not, already in place. The best tactic is to start where you are most likely to get a foothold and build synergy in the system from there. In Lancaster we decided to start with early and extended learning opportunities: full-day, rather than half-day, kindergarten; a city-wide early literacy campaign; teacher training in strategies to improve reading, writing, and math K-3; and extended learning time after school and in the summer for students who are not meeting standards. Moreover, because our rising first-graders in 2000-01 will have had the experience of full-day kindergarten, we shall expect our first grade teachers to be prepared to deal with a class of students who will have already achieved a higher standard.

There is no simple response for the second question either. For the most part, previous reforms never reached as deep as we must now reach to bring about lasting change for the better in public education. Changes in teacher beliefs and improved classroom practice are at the very core of the work we are undertaking. The name of the game is capacity-building and we must discover what this entails, or we shall find that the standards movement, too, will be yet another in a long list of failed reforms.

In Lancaster we expect that our deepest learning as a staff will take place as we grapple with the challenges of building teacher and school capacity. While we do not have all of the answers, we have made a start by:

- Providing professional development that is teacher-centered and school-based. This includes full-time instructional facilitators in each school and a partnership with Education Trust. Using Education Trust's Standards in Practice model, teachers are trained to analyze their lessons and units in light of the work that is produced by students. Our instructional facilitators provide onsite coaching and feedback for teachers and serve as a crucial communications link across the District.
- Designing content institutes (so that teachers maintain a thorough understanding of the subject areas they teach), and helping schools use standards as the basis for selecting curriculum materials and instructional strategies.
- Creating teacher-led networks in which participants can continuously enhance their knowledge base, share standards-based instructional practices, and raise and resolve common problems.
- Developing and providing access to reliable ways to measure and track student progress and assisting teachers to enhance their knowledge and use of those tools.

- Turning a relatively traditional Office of Curriculum Support into a flexible, service-oriented Office of Teaching and Learning.

Manage predictable distractions and do not reinvent the wheel unnecessarily

With virtually every implementation of standards-based reform, a set of predictable distractions rise to the surface. These are not minor distractions; they are important issues that have implications for policy and the potential to drain valuable time and energy from the core work of improving classroom instruction.

Report cards are a good example. With the shift to standards, it is reasonable to assume that our means of reporting progress should shift as well, away from traditional grades to something more aligned with standards. But in our zeal to bring about that alignment, we often make the shift before the majority of students, teachers, or parents are prepared to accept it. This creates unnecessary firestorms and distracts attention from teaching and learning.

As leaders, we must get better at laying our foundations and orchestrating the implementation of key components of reform. We can refuse to be drawn too early into issues that in the long run will support, but in the short run divert us from, the work at hand.

We also must reconsider our tendency to reinvent the wheel in the name of fostering local ownership. The development of standards is a good example. In Lancaster, the District spent thousands of dollars and teacher hours crafting standards for 19 separate subject areas. The standards were revised three years in a row, always involving large numbers of teachers. Yet, the chief complaint that I heard from teachers when I arrived in the District concerned the constant changing of the standards and their lack of clarity. An analysis of the New Standards Performance Standards against our own District standards in English/language arts, math, and science revealed only one minor difference in the requirements. But teachers discovered that the additional information available in New Standards (i.e., teacher commentaries and samples of student work) made the standards much clearer, and promptly requested permission to use New Standards throughout the District. Not only did Lancaster's overemphasis on local ownership cost the District valuable dollars, but the years that had been spent on revisions to the standards could have been better spent on instruction.

Lancaster is not alone in its tendency to reinvent the wheel in the name of local ownership. Most states and districts have spent time and dollars crafting their own versions of standards, assessments, and other promising reforms. This observation is not meant to be overly critical. I believe that fostering the local ownership of reforms is crucial. But as leaders we must not confuse the desire of the staff and the community to own the decision with the desire to invent the product. The wise expenditure of our time and dollars depends on our ability as leaders to know when to originate, when to modify, and when to adopt. As Isaac Asimov once remarked, "It is often better to imitate and overtake than to originate."

Make a whole new set of best friends

We shall achieve no reform of any substance without the involvement of everyone: staff, students, parents, business and civic leaders, city and county officials, union leaders, state legislators, clergy, and the citizenry. The tough communications lessons that have been learned on the ground in Kentucky, Philadelphia, and elsewhere have given us the foresight in Lancaster to forge strong bonds with virtually every section of the community and to open up internal communications dramatically.

Staff at all levels of the District communicate freely with me via e-mail and through group and individual discussions, putting their perspectives on the table and engaging in joint problem-solving. Our teachers' union conducts joint training of our standards and assessments with the Office of Teaching and Learning. The broadcast and print media work with us to get our message out and, for the most part, provide fair, supportive coverage of the District's efforts. Our business and civic leaders, the clergy, and our county commissioners have initiated a city-wide early literacy campaign to bring books and volunteers into our schools and to assure that nine out of ten students meet literacy standards at the end of primary school. Those same groups stepped to the forefront and said "No!" when the Governor intended to declare

Lancaster a "distressed district." As reasons for staying the Governor's decision, they cited our strategic plan, the support of the School Board and the community, and their own unwavering faith in the District's ability to turn itself around.

In turn, we work hard to be a part of, and not apart, from our community. We take an active role in connecting schools with their neighborhoods and in helping the community understand where we are going and how we plan to get there. Consequently, the support for standards and our brand of standards-based reform is tremendous.

The State is another story. On the one hand, the State's recent adoption of academic standards, coupled with state assessments in reading, writing and mathematics, is very helpful. On the other hand, our Governor's zealous support of vouchers and charter schools, combined with the lack of equitable funding, hampers our ability to implement reform as rapidly as we would like.

Face challenges and celebrate successes

We pay a lot of attention to what Robert Evans calls "the human face of reform." This is a large part of our success in overcoming resistance and barriers within the District. Periodically, we remind everyone that messiness and uncertainty are to be expected and are not all bad. We put the data on the table and talk about it – the good, the bad, and the ugly. We make it clear that we believe in our staff and will work tirelessly to help them gain access to the tools and skills they need. We hold *all-staff* meetings to talk about challenges and direction and to celebrate our progress, both the small victories and the large ones. We listen. We never take the focus off our children. And we never give up.

Staying the Course and Crossing the Finish Line

I left work in Philadelphia that I loved to come to Lancaster because I believe it represents two unique opportunities for me. First, because of multiple factors (size, reform agenda, Board support, a large number of quality staff), Lancaster affords me a tremendous chance to build capacity at the school level among teachers and principals – to understand what it takes to increase the quality of teaching and to embed instructional changes deep in the system. And secondly, Lancaster allows me to enrich my understanding of what it takes to build and sustain public will in times of intense challenge and change. Building both capacity and public will are key to maintaining our current momentum and countering the current debates that threaten to undermine standards-based reform.

In Lancaster, we have made a promise to ourselves and our community that can be found on the front page of our strategic plan. It goes like this:

Our Promise

We must **believe** in the **inherent ability**
of all children to reach the **high expectations**
which we set for **all** of them.

It is this **trust** in the natural potential
of every child, backed by **our purposeful action**,
that will produce the highest levels
of student achievement.

And when the results **for our**
students match the passion
of our pronouncements then we
shall know that we have
kept our promise.

Looking Back at a Decade of Reform: The Maryland Standards Story

by Nancy S. Grasmick
Maryland State Superintendent of Schools

Introduction

Maryland is now one of the nation's senior reform states, having begun its journey of education accountability in the late 1970s, when Maryland embarked on a plan to ensure that all students would graduate with at least minimal competency in reading, writing, and math. Since then, the state has worked diligently to ensure much more than minimal competency. A reform program ten years in the making might have its roots in establishing a performance floor, but the work before us for many years to come will be raising the *ceiling* for all students.

By now, the state has weathered many of accountability's expected political storms, and yet has stayed precisely on course in its quest for better public education for all children. The mechanisms have changed dramatically since our initial effort two decades ago, have become much more sophisticated, and have set standards and expectations much higher than imagined in the early days of reform. But policy makers have been steadfast in their focus, and Maryland has benefited much from the state's geographic smallness, from its diversity, and from its wisely crafted education governance structures, all of which have allowed the state to avoid, to a large degree, the troubled waters that have capsized efforts in some sister reform states.

Like everyone else who has embarked on the school reform journey, Maryland has not arrived at its destination – if one exists at all. Most states have long realized that the utopian dream ostensibly guiding all reform efforts – a top-quality education for *every* child – may ultimately be elusive. However, the tenor of public discourse on education is clear: the status quo is wholly unacceptable.

Over the past three decades, Marylanders have expressed the same frustrations about public schools voiced by citizens across the nation. Though considerable evidence reveals the successes of many public school programs, stiff international competition in the business arena reveals, too, that American schools are falling precipitously behind European and Asian school systems in terms of preparing today's youth for the next millennium. Maryland's response to this lag, particularly through policies initiated in the past decade, has rung true with a skeptical and often impatient public that, in urban areas particularly, has voted with its feet, fleeing failing public schools for private schools. That flight, fanning out today to include rural and suburban districts, is fueled, in part, by a strong economy that makes private school tuition increasingly accessible for middle-class families.

Governing for Change: How Maryland's Structure Facilitates Reform

Maryland's governance structure is particularly well suited for school reform, as it minimizes political distractions and allows state policy makers the luxury of a more or less navigable route. While the cycle of elected politics punctuates the crafting of other public policy, education policy in the state is uniquely evolutionary, resistant to the whipsaw of faddish trends and the seduction of unproven, glossy new reform ideas.

The State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Schools work cooperatively and faithfully from a decade-old blueprint for change, first drawn up in 1989 by a governor's commission on school reform. Reform mandates and mechanisms are crafted by the state board of education through regulations and supported with detailed policy work carried out by the State Department of Education. An abiding

consensus for and commitment to school reform and accountability have garnered wide gubernatorial and legislative support for the work of the Department and the Board. Consequently, when the State Board proposes new spending, the governor and legislature have grown to expect – and, indeed, always find – that proposals are focused on reform, hinge upon accountability to back up promises, and are consistent with the remainder of public education policy.

The mainstream political spectrum is somewhat narrower in Maryland than in many states. The legislature typically recognizes when maverick new legislators attempt to move public education policy into the realm of statute or law and habitually resists such moves. For example, one legislator's attempts over three consecutive years to scuttle the state's testing program were each quickly dismissed by the General Assembly. At the same time, Maryland's legislature has moved in unprecedented ways over the past three years to use the school accountability system as a tool to leverage state power over local school systems that fail to provide an adequate education for their children. It is clear that Board intervention will be swiftly invoked by state officials if current interventions fail or if other jurisdictions begin to fail in the future.

Maryland's State Board members, appointed on staggered terms by the governor and confirmed by the legislature, do not commonly use their positions as a stepping stone to other political office. More often, they have served previously on local school boards or county councils or as county executives. Membership has included retired local superintendents, former teachers and college professors, business people, nationally recognized education policy experts, and, of course, one high school student newly appointed each year. The array of backgrounds and experiences typically makes the Board both stable and knowledgeable of the broad implications of state education policy.

Much of education policy, particularly at the operational level, is deferred to local school systems, with curricula and instructional materials developed or selected locally. Twenty-four school systems in Maryland represent 23 counties and Baltimore City. Systems range in size from rural Kent County (2,800 students, 8 schools) to suburban Prince George's County (130,000 students, 187 schools). Obviously, needs and ability to pay vary across systems as widely as demographics. An equalization-based aid distribution plan, APEX (Action Plan for Education Excellence), is about a decade old and on the verge of being recast by the legislature with an eye to weaving a strong accountability strand into the fabric of future funding schemes.

Maryland, dubbed "America in Miniature," weathers each year challenges to the formation of state policy posed by these disparate rural and urban districts. Some of Maryland's local school systems, and consequently their central offices, are among the largest in the nation, and their capacity to drive and support curriculum and instruction is generally significant. Many of the state's smaller systems, on the other hand, have neither the staff nor the resources to meet all of the state-mandated requirements easily. This creates a dynamic tension between small and large school systems, both of which find one-size-fits-all state policy insensitive and often unmanageable. A similar tension exists between local school systems and the state as local superintendents and boards struggle with state directives.

Despite these rather universal challenges, Maryland benefits from its smallness, both in terms of geography and its few local districts. Monthly, the State Superintendent meets with all 24 local superintendents to talk through the implications of proposed policies and regulations and to iron out problems emerging in the implementation of existing policies. This open and ongoing dialogue helps ensure that state policies are realistic and manageable and provides a forum to discuss issues that would benefit from state leadership.

A Call to Action: The School-Reform Blueprint

Unlike many states, Maryland has neither a legislative nor court-ordered mandate for reform. The state's current plan, the Maryland School Performance Program, is a self-imposed, expandable, recursive program whose accountability features are fine-tuned while new components are developed as necessary. The

simplicity of the program's design dates back to 1987 when Governor William Donald Schaefer tapped Baltimore business leader, Walter Sondheim, Jr., to head a governor's commission on education. The commission's membership differed from education study groups preceding it in that customary education stakeholders were conspicuously absent. The charge was to lay out a blueprint for statewide mechanisms that would prod school performance improvements.

Prior to his term as the state's chief executive, Governor Schaefer was a longtime Baltimore City mayor during a troubled era in which public education began to fail. Statewide and nationwide signs of performance decline, such as slipping SAT scores, were abundant. Governor Schaefer was concerned that while vast expenditures on education were draining public coffers, academics were *still* inadequately addressed. Further, as the state's chief executive, he was charged with ensuring that Maryland remain an economically viable state and an attractive site for business expansion and relocation. Baltimore had been a strong manufacturing center during the past century, but shifts in the national economy over the last few decades resulted in the closing or scaling back of many local operations such as the Bethlehem Steel and Sparrows Point shipyards. If, for decades, a strong back and a will to work were all that were necessary for one to live comfortably, it was quite clear that, in the long run, education was the key to the comfortable life.

Mr. Sondheim was the perfect leader for the Governor's Commission on School Performance. He understood with keen insight both educational and economic issues. Now 91 years old and president of the State Board, Mr. Sondheim had seen Baltimore through significant transitions. As president of the Baltimore Board of School Commissioners in 1954 – the year the Supreme Court issued *Brown v. Board of Education* – he oversaw the desegregation of Baltimore's schools. Perhaps better than anyone else, then, he knew how difficult change was and yet, just as assuredly, how accountability must be the backbone of any sustainable change effort.

The Commission released its final report, a terse 30-page document, to Maryland educators and citizens in the fall of 1989 – a scant two years since the commission's inception. The report is based on three premises:

- All children can learn.
- All children have the right to attend schools in which they can progress and learn.
- All children shall have a real opportunity to learn equally rigorous content.

The report recommended a handful of actions that challenged education leaders to break practically and ideologically with the past and lay out an action plan focused solely on the three premises mentioned above. The report suggested the following:

- **Identify what we value about learning.** Too often, schools lack focus on academics and student success. Innumerable issues distract educators and parents from the simple task of articulating what they feel schools should accomplish. Consequently, day-to-day lessons and testing programs are often disconnected. The report challenged educators and the public to focus on what they really wanted from their schools.
- **Measure those things we value about learning**. Time and again, educators tell us that they "teach to the test," that they "treasure what they measure." Clearly, if we are accountable for those things we value most, we will make those issues a priority in the classroom.
- **Determine acceptable parameters for performance.** We must define for teachers, principals, and parents unsatisfactory, satisfactory, and excellent performance.
- **Report school performance to the public.** For years, the culture in Maryland was to avoid comparisons between successful and failing schools. The practice, in part a strategy to permit lagging schools time to "catch up," also reflected a seldom spoken belief that poor and minority students simply could not perform as well as their peers.

- **Intervene when schools fail**. Subsequently modified, the Commission's original recommendation was that the State Department of Education certify successful schools and decertify and then reopen – with major operational and programmatic improvements – failing schools. Our greatest challenge lies in improving schools that face complex and longstanding barriers which predict, if not guarantee, failure.
- **Reward schools that succeed.** A simple concept fraught with pitfalls, financially rewarding schools that have improved over time illustrates for the public the more appealing side of accountability, a strategy particularly important in neighborhoods where educational mediocrity is tacitly accepted.
- **Cultivate a climate that will support instructional improvement.** While Maryland's accountability system was instituted to benchmark progress, accountability, alone, is not sufficient to improve student achievement. For that, you also need committed school improvement teams that have the data to make informed, school-specific curricular and instructional decisions and the authority to carry them out. The assessment and accountability systems, augmented with data- and improvement-driven web sites, were designed to invest school improvement teams with both.
- **Issue waivers to state regulations that impede gains**. Preceding by many years Ed-Flex, the waiving of state regulations has been, quite surprisingly, the least used feature of all of the Commission's recommendations.

The State's Response

The Commission's report was issued in the fall of 1989; by December of that year, the State Department of Education had established the School Performance Office to oversee the implementation of the report's recommendations. During the first six months of 1990, the Department convened groups to set content and design for assessments that would function as one of the state's performance measures. Other statewide groups met for months to hammer out the details of a public reporting mechanism that would eventually include the new tests. The groups identified existing measurements associated with school performance that would round out the view of school effectiveness. Included were dropout and attendance rates and score distributions on the state's functional graduation tests.

A thoughtful process produced a somewhat austere report card that was free of educational jargon. From an initial listing of nearly 100 possible report card measures, 13 were identified that could be collected and reported consistently statewide. A larger set of data was added to provide the context for viewing the accountability data. Per the Commission's recommendation, the study groups defined for each accountability measure *satisfactory* and *excellent* performance. These two boxes, checked appropriately in the report's pages, were accompanied by a third indicating standards "not yet met."

The report card expanded in scope as new tests were added in 1993, but the basic design has remained. The identification of report card items was based on an exhaustive review of all possible items and their evaluation against a single set of criteria – the same set that will be used as the state considers adding new items. A five-year review cycle was established with the first report card as a way to revise report items through a process as thoughtful as the original. Following a 1995 review, student promotion rate was pulled from the report because the five-year trial indicated that the item, ostensibly a good indicator of program effectiveness, became a compelling incentive for social promotion. The State Board readily agreed to a proposal to remove the item from the report card.

The Proof's in the Pudding: Implementing Tougher Tests

Again, per the Commission's report, the Department developed in 1991 the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP), a series of tests administered in grades 3, 5, and 8 that aggregates results at the school, system, and state levels. While tests administered statewide customarily

produce individual results, the new tests would measure only *school* performance. Individual student data would be available, but the tests' psychometric design put confidence levels for the individual significantly below the 90-percent confidence level for the school. Consequently, Maryland remains perhaps the only state with a school performance accountability program that bases decisions on school data rather than student data.

At the time Maryland crafted its assessments, selected-response or multiple-choice tests were the norm. Performance-based assessment was just emerging, along with a growing body of research conducted by cognitive psychologists and neurologists about how children learn – research that supported performance-based assessment design. These same scientists challenged educators to revamp instruction and assessment accordingly. Thus, Maryland moved fully into the performance assessment arena with a system that promised to provide a wealth of information to school administrators and teachers, information that would help shape improvements. It was the first time that Maryland instructional experts were consulted *before* a test was produced. Those consultations paid off; MSPAP was designed from the start both to reflect and to promote good instruction.

The new assessments, by now affectionately dubbed *Mizpap* for their puzzling acronym, were administered to students in May 1991 and again in 1992 before they were installed on the state report card following the 1993 testing; 1993 now serves as our baseline year. Both trial tests permitted time to rework designs and to improve production mechanisms.

Some teachers, accustomed to having students simply darken bubbles on answer sheets, were uncomfortable with an assessment that looked a good bit like a series of challenging lessons culminating in detailed written responses to questions posed – responses requiring both accuracy and coherence. The assessments were controversial at first, particularly to some parents who thought the written-response format was subjective and the tested knowledge and skills heedless of the basics. Meanwhile, Maryland educators, in an effort to explain to parents the intent and design of the assessments, often described MSPAP as testing "higher-order thinking skills." For some parents, the notion of testing higher-order thinking – and, presumably, not the basics – was negligent *and* suspect. Miscues such as these in the early days of MSPAP contributed to pockets of discomfort with an assessment that was, year in and year out, also producing low school scores. Controversy also found a voice in the *basis* for MSPAP – the Maryland Learning Outcomes – an elaborate document produced in the spring of 1990 with the help of educators from around the state. Maryland's outcomes are clearly academic in basis and bear little resemblance to the outcomes featured in failed reform programs launched in other states. Those outcomes came under intense fire from critics for their lack of substance. Unfortunately, reform opposition groups in Pennsylvania launched a campaign against that state's outcome-based reforms and subsequently produced a spate of literature and rhetoric that was soon picked up by conservative groups in Maryland. When faced with the term *outcome*, this small group of parents and activists made assumptions about the lack of rigor of Maryland tests and launched its own smaller scale attack in this state.

Further confusion developed as parents struggled to understand the differences between criterion-referenced and norm-referenced assessments. Understandably, they could not readily equate a 33-percent satisfactory level on MSPAP – the state composite in 1993 – with the expected 50th percentile or higher on nationally norm-referenced tests. The performance waters were further muddied by the fact that many judged success by the academic scale that equates an "A" to 90 percent, "B" to 80 percent, and so on. Early on, improved communication would become absolutely critical in ensuring that Marylanders would see that the rigorous tests were actually prodding the kind of accountability and improvement they demanded of their neighborhood schools.

Improvement was, in fact, readily apparent on nearly every page of Maryland's 1998 School Performance Report. While a chasm still separates the two, bottom-ranking Baltimore City and top-ranking Howard County continued their march toward state standards. In 1993, Department officials declared that 70 percent

of the state's students would average a satisfactory score on MSPAP. With a 1998 composite score hovering around 44 points, the state is unlikely to meet the admittedly ambitious 70-percent goal. However, many schools statewide do now routinely meet the standard by grade and content area.

The Town *Is* Big Enough: Two Tests Peaceably Coexist

While the "content" waters have become much more navigable in recent memory, perhaps the most resilient MSPAP-related complaint six full years into testing is that the assessments cannot, by design, produce reliable *student* results. Now, it seems, they won't have to. Maryland is preparing for compulsory CTBS/5 administration to all students in grades 2, 4, and 6. While CTBS/5 has been administered rather consistently to a small sample of students in each system to provide for generic comparisons with national groups, the legislature agreed in its 1999 session to fund the annual administration of the test so that the Department could provide CTBS/5 and student-specific MSPAP data to parents. Following the December 1999 testing, student reports will provide parents both state and local measures of individual student performance, though school performance ratings will still be determined exclusively by MSPAP.

This piece of legislation, passed with little fanfare, actually reflects the strength of Maryland's sustained reform efforts. The nationally norm-referenced test correlates closely with MSPAP, but lacks the latter's accountability, which has been so successful in compelling districts to make instructional improvements. The General Assembly authorized additional testing because members recognized the Board's desire to offer parents both stringent school accountability *and* individual results.

The quiet addition of CTBS/5 to Maryland's testing arsenal – an arsenal already well-stocked given many school systems' voluntary administration of CTBS/5 and various homegrown assessments – illustrates legislators' commitment to maintaining the current accountability system. Clearly, abandoning the state's baseline performance measure would break a trend line that has, for seven years, provided critical data on school improvement and vividly marks each school's road to reform.

Content standards, essential for curricular alignment and consistency, did double duty as an innovative outreach tool for parents and teachers alike. Produced this year after 18 months in development, Maryland's content standards provide the bridge between state testing outcomes and local instructional curricula. While allowing school systems to maintain local curricula, the content standards will specify for parents – in clear and explicit language – what teachers will be expected to teach and what students will be expected to master. The Maryland Learning Outcomes, slated for revision so that they align with the content standards, will benefit from the clarity of language employed by the standards. These two steps, critical for continuity in instruction and assessment, also help the Department explain to parents and teachers the state's integrated system of standards and expectations and the concrete linkages that connect each.

Staying the Course: Taking Reform to High School

Even as the school performance program was getting under way in the early 1990s, it was evident that the high school functional tests remaining from the 1970s – first rolled out under the name Project Basic – were fast becoming obsolete. Created to ensure that no student would graduate lacking minimal skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and citizenship, the standard set was low and the pass rate was, consequently, high. Few Maryland high school students failed to graduate solely because of these assessments.

But rigorous or not, the functional tests set an important precedent for Maryland reform efforts. For the first time in state history, a diploma was not guaranteed simply for *attending* high school. In many ways, Project Basic cleared the path for the more substantive reforms undertaken decades later. First, the tests established not only state performance standards but also the mechanisms for changing curriculum and instruction accordingly. The state became adept at policy development and dissemination. The Department

learned the value of inclusive decision-making and the importance of technical assistance and communication at all junctures in the implementation timeline. Department and local staff became increasingly expert in developing and administering large-scale assessments. They appropriated technologies to handle the logistics of transfer and analysis. Finally, school systems and schools learned how to create and implement intervention systems for students requiring remediation.

While Maryland learned the how to's of statewide testing in the 1970s and 1980s, the State Board began reworking high school graduation requirements. Traditionally, state-issued diploma criteria established the floor upon which many local school systems built additional requirements. But as reports to the Board chronicled the extent to which these criteria, established in the mid-1980s, were outdated, and as staff began assessing schools' capacities to produce graduates ready for the next millennium, many saw the state's minimalist approach to standards setting as insufficient to spur local change. In 1993, the State Board voted to expand the requirements for a Maryland high school diploma, adding more mathematics and science coursework and eliminating the plethora of electives offered to students.

While increasing course requirements was a credible beginning to the state's high school reform agenda, the Board agreed with Department staff that improved high school exit examinations – examinations supplanting the functional tests – were warranted as well. However, lest the state put the testing cart before the curricular horse, a statewide task force began laying some sorely needed groundwork. In 1996, after two years in development, the Core Learning Goals were unveiled. In specifying the content 9th - 12th graders would be expected to master, the Core Learning Goals serve as the high school equivalent of the Maryland Learning Outcomes, with which MSPAP is aligned. With the biggest piece of the assessment infrastructure now in place, the Board continued in 1997 the course begun years earlier in the elementary grades, approving a tentative phase-in schedule for ten end-of-course exams for the graduating class of 2004. The Board later agreed to one year of no-fault testing in 2000, thus delaying the for-credit administration to take effect with the class of 2005.

The high school assessments may turn out to be the most complex of all the reforms undertaken thus far. The Maryland School Performance Assessment Program documents school performance, and demands, therefore, collective accountability; the high school assessments, however, are designed to gauge each student's performance, exacting, simultaneously, individual accountability – from teachers as well as students. There is no doubt that arming principals with specific data on student achievement – and, by extrapolation, teacher performance – will improve curriculum and instruction. There is also no doubt that these tests will come with consequences for teachers whose students consistently struggle, especially when the consequences for students appear so severe.

Maryland has avoided this public relations quagmire, to some degree, by involving teachers in the development and review of both the Core Learning Goals and the test items; this involvement keeps the two reflective of one another and of reasonable expectations.

What If They Fail? A Safety Net for Students in Trouble

In approving the high school assessments, the State Board realized it had raised serious concerns regarding responsibility, equity, and accountability, and had thus created a new imperative for monitoring individual student progress and for instituting a comprehensive program of prevention and intervention to begin early in students' academic careers.

In January 1998, the State Board adopted a resolution calling for the Department to put in place for the 1999-2000 school year a comprehensive K-12 program of intervention assistance for students not succeeding in reading or math or in one of the tested content areas. In essence, the Board was making good on public education's most quixotic promise: to let no child fall through the cracks. Board members were so thoroughly

convinced that such a safety net was necessary that they directed the Department to draft and implement a viable intervention program *in advance of* the rapidly approaching tests.

The Department's complex response to this complex proposal took the form of *Every Child Achieving: A Plan for Meeting the Needs of the Individual Learner.* Developed in partnership with the Pew Forum, the plan recommends strategies to prevent student failure through *academic intervention*; to strengthen teachers' skills and administrators' leadership by improving *educator capacity*; and to enhance learning experiences for very young children to ensure *student readiness.*

The plan is ambitious, certainly. It calls for the state and districts to change the fundamental systems that affect children's development and learning, and to focus resources – including time and money – more sharply on individual students who are struggling to meet the state's increasingly rigorous standards.

The very first broad plan recommendations define the instruments that will make up the third millennium's education machine. All local school systems will implement the state's *content standards* and develop *benchmarks* and *milestones* to measure each student's progress toward these standards. Local school systems will use a range of *assessments* to continuously judge each student's performance against these indicators, and will access a *state resource bank* to help select or create the most effective assessment and intervention programs.

By the end of grades 3, 5, and 7, local school systems will create *individual learning plans* requiring mandatory extended learning opportunities for students with deficiencies in reading and math. *Summer intervention programs* will be mandated for students failing to reach locally established proficiency levels by the end of grade 8.

And because the research indicates that early education holds more promise for *preventing* learning difficulties than remediation does for *reversing* them, plan writers also made substantial provisions for beefing up early childhood education. The plan calls for the state to make a public investment in early childhood education; open professional development activities to early care providers; lobby on their behalf for higher wages and a career ladder; and increase early education's standards and staff competencies and financially reward the programs that maintain both.

The Department asked the State Board to include as a priority in its FY 2001 funds to support both the early learning portion of the initiative and the mandatory summer school program proposed for next year's 8th graders – the students in most imminent danger of entering high school unprepared for the new tests.

Intervening When Schools Fail

Reconstitution is likely the most dreaded word in the school reform lexicon – and with good reason. It's a political landmine that has, nonetheless, been embraced by many states precisely because takeover – and sometimes even the threat of it – has proven essential to forcing school systems to attend to the needs of their least successful schools. The Governor's Commission on School Performance proposed the unfathomable in 1989, observing that many schools were failing with little hope of resuscitation, and that this neglect was unconscionable for the thousands of children languishing in their classrooms.

In Maryland, reconstitution is essentially a probationary model. The schools benefit from increased state monitoring and funding but are essentially left under district control – at least initially. Described by some observers as "sleight of hand," reconstitution in Maryland is no gentle process, although detailed in state regulations and not prescribed by law. Rigid timetables set the pace for each phase of the improvement process.

Districts housing reconstitution-eligible schools, named each January, must have identified school-specific problems and outlined steps the school and school system will take to remedy those problems by April 1. By June 1, each school must file a transition plan with the State Board describing how a long-term reconstitution program will be developed. And by May 1 of the following year, a fully developed restructuring plan must be in place. Plans typically include changes in instructional programs, staffing, and administration, and must address the specific problems that hamper the school's ability to improve.

This is the sixth consecutive year that Maryland has identified poor-performing, declining schools for possible state intervention, based on Maryland School Performance Program indicators, such as attendance and dropout rates and test scores. Since 1994, 97 schools have been named reconstitution-eligible.

Reconstitution regulations call for the identification of schools below state standards, but do not require the identification of *all* schools below standards. The sparse regulations specify only the measures that will be included in the algorithm used to determine the poorest performing, declining schools. Because no absolute numerical parameters are established in the regulations, the State Superintendent is permitted some leeway in making selections. Currently, Maryland identifies the poorest performing schools and pulls from that list only those that are declining. While traditionally the same each year, the school performance index cutoff points – identifying schools eligible for reconstitution – are adjustable.

When the Governor's Commission first recommended intervening in failing schools, members expected that this intervention would touch a small number of schools in, perhaps, many of the state's 24 school systems. Rather, it has become an enterprise enforced largely in Baltimore City, whose schools on the reconstitution rolls reached 83 in January 1999. The remaining 14 schools are scattered among three districts: Prince George's County (12), Anne Arundel County (1), and Somerset County (1).

Where reconstitution eligibility is working the way it was designed – to focus a system's attention, supervision, and resources on that school – we are seeing tremendous gains. School systems supporting just one reconstitution-eligible school have the capacity to shift staff and funds accordingly. Under the proposed reconstitution exit formula, for example, Woodson Middle School in rural Somerset County is just .28 points away from being taken off the reconstitution-eligible list.

In Baltimore City, however, where nearly half the schools are reconstitution-eligible, giving any one of them priority is virtually impossible. The first two schools ever identified – both in 1994, both in Baltimore City – are still under the auspices of reconstitution-eligibility, prompting some legislators and community leaders to call for tougher, swifter state action. The sentiment is, perhaps surprisingly, welcome. In the early days of reconstitution – when the public wanted accountability but not necessarily its implications – even deeming a school *eligible* for state takeover drew fire from communities that believed educational problems were theirs alone to solve. This recognition that some problems are so insidious, pervasive, and persistent as to warrant intervention represents a rather profound shift in public opinion.

Clearly, full-scale reconstitution, or state takeover, is on the horizon for some reconstitution-eligible schools, possibly with the assistance of private providers. However, 40 of the 48 Baltimore City schools named reconstitution-eligible as of two years ago *have* improved – nine by ten points or more on the school performance index – lending credence to the practice of allowing schools to remain under local control until documented progress is too incremental to effect significant improvement.

The fact remains, however, that no matter how good a job we do at turning an individual school around, we must be confident, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the infrastructure, support, and capacity are there to sustain the growth. That infrastructure, that support, and that capacity are what the state is building now.

Rewarding Schools When They Succeed

In 1996, employing the same performance variables and algorithm used to determine reconstitution-eligible schools, the Department first recognized schools that had shown consistent and sustained gains over

one or more years. School recognition costs Maryland $2.75 million annually – a tab the legislature was not ready to pay *until* the Department's reporting mechanism and intervention system were solidly in place. Schools posting gains over two or more consecutive years – 83 schools in 1998 – split the appropriated $2.75 million, and one-year improvements are recognized with certificates. Guidelines, which prohibit using the funds for bonuses, raises, and new professional hires, instead encourage programmatic improvements and technology and material upgrades.

In response to a particularly pernicious racial performance gap, the state's Education That Is Multicultural Task Force this year recommended that recognition and rewards be based on disaggregated performance data and take into account the results of minority and other subpopulations. The Department is, therefore, amending the procedures by which schools are identified for recognition and state-sponsored incentives.

Where the Rubber Hits the Road: Using Data to Drive Reforms

Leveraging System Control

While spurring a host of programmatic and instructional improvements, Maryland's accountability program has had an equally important influence on state and local policy. The legislature has shown confidence enough in the accountability program to use it to leverage change when necessary.

In 1997, for the first time ever, student achievement data were used to compel fundamental change in Baltimore City's public schools and stop the system's decades of decline. By 1998, despite small gains, barely 16 percent of Baltimore City students performed satisfactorily on MSPAP. Dismal scores, coupled with managerial deficiencies revealed during a performance audit, fueled legislative action that essentially forced Baltimore City to cede to the state some of its autonomy in return for more state aid. Such action would have been considered unthinkable – and, without detailed performance and trend data, baseless – a decade earlier. Prince George's County underwent similar legislative scrutiny in 1999 with marginally less prescriptive results.

Improving Minority Performance

Cumulative state data have revealed the same kind of performance gaps among minority groups that national studies have documented for years. Disaggregated MSPAP results last year showed that the percentage of white males performing satisfactorily on MSPAP was 2½ times that of black males. Corroborating state NAEP results, which disclosed a 38 percent 4th-grade reading proficiency gulf between white and black students, the scores lent legitimacy to the formation of an Education That Is Multicultural Advisory Council, appointed to recommend strategies to raise the lagging performance of Maryland's African American and Hispanic students. All school systems are now required to have a plan in place to address such performance deficits.

The Department is now acting upon all six of the Advisory Council's broad recommendations:

- That any consideration of schools' progress toward state standards explicitly include consideration of minority students' performance as well as overall results.
- That recognition and rewards be based on disaggregated performance data and take into account the results of minority and other subpopulations.
- That the Department's discretionary resources support district programs that close achievement gaps.
- That the Department establish a program to identify and distribute information about exemplary strategies for raising minority achievement.
- That the Department investigate the relationship between poverty and academic performance in terms of school organization, use of funds, access to technology, and teacher preparation and experience.

- That the Department identify successful high-minority, high-poverty schools and disseminate their best practices.

Putting the Focus on Reading

While the percentage of Maryland 4th graders performing at or above basic on the NAEP reading test has increased from 55 percent to 61 percent, the fact remains that 1 in 3 students show no mastery whatsoever of grade-level reading work. MSPAP scores are no less bleak. Just 40 percent of the state's 3rd and 5th graders performed satisfactorily on the reading portion of the test. It was these scores that prompted an unprecedented focus on literacy that – now more than two years old – is as sharp as ever.

A reading task force appointed in 1998 recommended expanding the time devoted to, and altering the content of, reading instruction. But garnering the most attention, perhaps, was a recommendation that ultimately translated into regulatory amendments requiring additional reading theory and methodology coursework for preservice *and* inservice teachers.

With the state previously demanding just one reading course for elementary school teachers, and none at all for middle and high school teachers, the scales seemed already tipped toward failure. Replacing the three credits formerly required of elementary teachers, the State Board endorsed 12 semester hours in reading process and acquisition, instruction, material selection, and reading assessment. The Board said, too, that the responsibility for teaching reading does not end in the primary grades and, with that, required of all middle and high school teachers six semester hours in instruction and practice.

While the higher education community agreed in principle that more and stronger coursework in reading instruction was warranted, members feared that this brand of specificity – never imposed before – would circumscribe programmatic decision-making and hamper their autonomy. Therefore, the Department solicited higher education's help in identifying the content that would be covered under each topic and gave deans the latitude to inject the material into existing coursework. Additionally, the fact that the recommended content was based on emerging and credible reading research lent validity to the requirements and facilitated support among these stakeholders, whose buy-in was imperative.

Another key outcome of the reading task force's work was the establishment of a partnership among the Department, the Johns Hopkins University, and the Kennedy Krieger Institute. Benefiting from a $14.2 million grant, the Center for Reading Excellence will train teachers to use the latest brain research concerning how children learn to read in designing their instructional practices.

Schools serving a high proportion of at-risk students are the program's first beneficiaries. The Department is now gathering longitudinal data on poor-performing schools by matching reconstitution-eligible high schools to their feeder schools and tracing the problems – in full flower by 9th grade – to their seeds, most notably students' inability to read by the end of grade 2. The Center will be piloted in many of these schools and, if successful, will be sustained and replicated, thus promoting meaningful systemic reform.

Restructuring the Middle School

Middle schools across the nation have come under fire from TIMSS researchers who documented significant erosion in U.S. students' performance between 4th and 8th grades. State data reveal clearly, as well, that the oft-termed "middle-school malaise" affects Maryland just as severely as it affects the nation. Declining three points since 1997, MSPAP scores show that just 25.5 percent of Maryland's 8th graders perform satisfactorily on the reading portion of the test, quite a disturbing trend considering the fact that 3rd and 5th graders have gained 11 and 16 points, respectively, since testing began. This pattern is particularly troubling, as well, given that many middle school students will likely be severely unprepared for the coming high school assessments.

Middle schools, which germinated more than three decades ago as a reaction to junior high schools that ignored the developmental needs of young adolescents, now frequently function as mere way stations on the

journey from elementary to high school. Recognizing that academic rigor in the middle learning years is too often lacking, the Department appointed a Middle Learning Years Taskforce in 1998 to recommend significant changes to middle-school structure, curriculum, and instruction. Noting that the cognitive, psychological, and physiological needs of adolescents are unique and complex, the task force found it unacceptable that Maryland's middle school teachers hold either elementary or secondary licenses – the former often requiring insufficient *content* knowledge, and the latter requiring insufficient *developmental* knowledge. The Department is now ready to embark on middle years licensure, a notion that requires an entirely new breed of teacher preparation.

Enhancing Teacher Quality

Enhancing teacher quality might very well prove the *most* important reform issue as we broker change for a new millennium, for the very fact that every other initiative presupposes it. Whereas the educational establishment once presumed that when all other things are constant, teacher quality matters, it seems they now apprehend that all other things don't *have* to be constant. Teacher quality matters – *matters more than anything else* – anyway.

Unfortunately, nearly eclipsing the teacher quality issue today is the teacher supply issue. Over the next decade, the U.S. will need 2.2 million new teachers. By the fall of 2001, Maryland, alone, will need nearly 10,500, while we customarily fill just 5,500 teaching posts a year. Compounding the problem is that Maryland's colleges and universities produce only 2,500 new teachers annually, and just 1,700 of them decide to teach in Maryland. Recruiting highly qualified teachers, however, is only part of the problem. Retaining them is no less a task. While across-the-board attrition hovers at about 6 percent, that figure rises to 10 percent among teachers aged 25-29, many of whom pursue more lucrative positions in science, technology, and business.

Industrial norms have long dictated that high demand weakens supply. But when that industry is education – and that product is a teacher – inferior quality is not an option. That's why a teacher incentive package, carefully crafted by the Department and passed by the General Assembly during its 1999 session, includes provisions designed not just to fill classrooms, but to fill classrooms with the *most talented, most capable* candidates.

The provisions, scaled back a little in each iteration, grant: $1,000 signing bonuses for graduates in the top 10 percent of their class; $2,000-a-year stipends for mentor teachers who volunteer to teach in reconstitution-eligible schools; $2,000 stipends for teachers who achieve and retain national certification (which can be matched dollar-for-dollar by the local school systems); and an optional extension of new teachers' probationary period from 2 to 3 years, at the discretion of local boards of education.

A new round of incentive provisions will carry on the work of the last, while providing more money for professional development schools; expanding resident teacher programs, so that qualified individuals can earn certification without having to jump through obligatory – and sometimes arbitrary – hoops; targeting resources to critical shortage areas; and intensively marketing the profession in an effort to reverse the pernicious supply-demand equation.

Strengthening K-16 Partnerships

A common thread tying each of these reforms together is the fact that all demand close collaboration with, and buy-in from, the higher education community. The reading coursework enacted last year, the middle school licensure just proposed, nearly all of the teacher quality and certification issues with which Maryland is now grappling – all would have, or will, come to nothing without support across the K-16 continuum.

A key agent of this support has been the Maryland Higher Education Commission, established in 1988. In 1995, the Commission's Teacher Education Task Force undertook a reevaluation of teacher preparation

and issued 21 ambitious recommendations – recommendations on which the Department is now acting. The report calls for *all* teacher candidates to enroll in a yearlong internship at a professional development school – a hybrid of preservice preparation and professional development established jointly by a school or school system and a university. Because professional development schools reflect the latest research and practice, they model the best in teaching and learning for pre-K to 12 students, future and current teachers, and college faculty *and* provide systemic linkage between teacher education design and school reform efforts.

While professional development schools seem the most promising way to wed theory to practice, there are alternatives. Every preservice course can incorporate a related – and interrelated – field component, the aggregate effect of which simulates the full-immersion experience.

The report also calls for all teacher candidates to pursue a degree in a single academic content area; a degree in an academic inter- or multi-disciplinary program; or, as an alternative, a degree in an undergraduate education program that is performance-based in design, includes a performance-based assessment measuring the student's knowledge of both academic content and pedagogy, and is predicated upon rigorous academic requirements.

This weighty proposal acknowledges the fact that for far too long students have been graduated from teacher education colleges with shallow academic backgrounds. By an education major's junior year, he or she is typically taking all theory and pedagogy classes; moreover, the arts and sciences coursework taken as an underclassman are, in all likelihood, comparable to high school courses in complexity. There is no doubt that a well-prepared teaching force is the product of cross-campus collaboration –education *and* arts and sciences faculty alike – especially as explicit content standards take center stage in the classroom and require articulation with the higher education curriculum.

While the report stopped just short of abolishing the education undergraduate program, performance-based course design is also fresh territory for most states. Using ongoing, formative assessments to judge a candidate's readiness to teach; determining the traits high-quality teachers possess; using multiple measures to arrive at this summative judgment – undoubtedly, this is the critical work many states will be undertaking for the next few years.

Strengthening Business Partnerships

Maryland's education-business link was established largely through the Maryland Business Roundtable for Education (MBRT), a coalition of 105 businesses that have made a long-term commitment to support education reform and improve student achievement. Founded in 1992, MBRT works with the legislature, the executive office, and the State Board to preserve key elements of Maryland's reform agenda. MBRT was instrumental in garnering support for more rigorous high school standards and exit exams; oversaw the Maryland Plan for Technology in Education, which significantly increased student and teacher access to technology; developed a model for school-business partnerships; provided business partners for schools in need of assistance; and launched Achievement Counts, a campaign that encourages Maryland employers to use high school transcripts in the hiring process. The group also worked closely with the Department to create the school improvement web site, design a statewide professional development plan, and conduct workforce skills surveys that gauge the hiring needs of Maryland's employers.

Conclusion

Reform is not easy. It is so decidedly difficult because, by design, it challenges everything we have come to know about the business of education – and the habits of educating. While Maryland is indeed one of the senior reformers, "senior" means little more than still learning and still improving. However, ten years at the school reform wheel *does* bring some insight. Following are some accountability lessons Maryland has learned:

- Formulate a plan that is focused, but flexible. Outline those principles you will not sacrifice and the goals from which you will not deviate. At the same time, recognize that the route that takes you there might change. The less (needlessly) prescriptive the plan, the less time spent hashing out regulatory minutiae as course corrections are made.
- Don't be afraid to start with standards. Odds are, without the infrastructure to support you, you won't come close to meeting them. But if the standards are researched and valid, challenging yet attainable, you will quickly amass the data you need to build that infrastructure.
- Make accountability the mandate in everything you do. It will instill confidence in the people you need as partners. Three years ago, Maryland was able to secure $66 million in new public school funds from the legislature because accountability measures were explicitly defined – if progress couldn't be documented regularly, the Department knew it had better make some course corrections ... and fast.
- Keep devolving accountability – state to district to school to teacher to student. No one is absolved from the process of continual improvement.

Implementing Standards-Based Reform: Challenges for State Policy

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State education policies have been in a state of flux for the past decade in response to political and popular pressure to raise academic standards and increase achievement among *all* students in the United States. States are redesigning their curricular, assessment, accountability, teacher development, finance and governance policies within a common policy framework of *systemic*, or *standards-based reform*.

The purpose of the state standards-based reform strategy is to provide top-down (state-level) support of bottom-up (school-site based) reform. The strategy has three major prongs.[1] The first is a ***unifying vision and goals*** that provide a coherent direction for education reform throughout the system. States should establish student outcome goals that focus primarily on the core functions of the education system – teaching and learning, and they should encompass high standards.

The second prong of the systemic reform strategy is a *coherent system of state policy guidance* that promotes these ambitious student outcomes. This involves the coordination of key state policies affecting teaching and learning: curriculum and curriculum materials, pre-service and in-service teacher training, and assessment. State-developed curriculum frameworks that set out the best thinking about what students should know and be able to do in core academic areas can provide the direction for locally-developed curriculum and for state professional development and assessment policies. States must then assure that prospective and practicing teachers have the content knowledge and instructional skills required to teach the content of the frameworks through program certification and teacher licensure requirements, and programmatic and financial support of professional development opportunities that are aligned with the new curriculum content standards. An assessment system designed to measure student knowledge of the new content standards would provide information on student progress and stimulate and support good instruction in the schools.

The third prong of the systemic reform model is a *restructured governance system* that defines the responsibilities of the various levels of the system to facilitate classroom adoption of the new content and pedagogy. State government's role is to set system and student goals for the state, coordinate these long-term instructional goals across various state policies, and hold schools and school districts accountable for meeting these goals. Schools are then given the authority to develop the specific curricula, programs, and instructional approaches needed to achieve their goals. The main responsibility of school districts is to provide resources and support the efforts of schools to educate all of the district's children to meet state and district goals. In addition, states and school districts must ensure that all students within their boundaries are treated fairly, especially regarding the allocation of resources.

By 1998, nearly all states had put some components of standards-based reform into place. All states, except Iowa, were in the process of developing or implementing standards in at least mathematics and language arts; 40 states had developed standards in the four core areas of language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.[2] Forty-six states have or will have state assessments based on their state standards in at least one of the four core subject areas; 35 states report having or developing aligned assessments in all four subjects.[3] States have also developed more comprehensive accountability systems. Two-thirds (36) of the states publish annual school report cards; 22 states reward schools and/or districts with successful student

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[1] Marshall S. Smith and Jennifer O'Day, "Systemic School Reform," in *The Politics of Curriculum and Testing*, ed. Susan H. Fuhrman and Betty Malen (London: Falmer Press, 1991), 233-267.
[2] American Federation of Teachers (AFT), *Making Standards Matter 1998: An Annual Report on Efforts to Raise Academic Standards* (Washington, DC, 1998).
[3] Ibid.

performance, and 16 states impose sanctions on failing schools.[4] Increasingly, states are holding students accountable for performance on state assessments. Nearly half of the states (24) link, or plan to link, receipt of a high school diploma to achievement of state standards in at least one core subject; ten states have or will develop policies for ending social promotion.[5]

As states construct their systems of standards-based reform, we must begin to examine how different policies, and combinations of policies, impact local policy and practice. More than twenty years of research on the implementation of state and federal education policies shows that change ultimately depends on the willingness and capacity of local communities, schools, and teachers to implement these policies. This paper uses data from a longitudinal study of the development and implementation of education reform in 8 states and 23 school districts to describe local response to the standards movement, and, based on this response, to identify challenges for state policy in implementing standards-based reform in the years ahead.[6] Findings from this study are supplemented by other research where appropriate.

The first section of the paper describes how districts have responded to state standards-based reform policies, focusing on the areas of standards, accountability and assessment, and capacity. In the second section, I discuss seven design and implementation issues that emerge from the analysis of the district data, other research, and CPRE's on-going analysis of the state policies themselves. These issues concern: (1) policy stability; (2) policy strength; (3) policy guidance; (4) multiple points of accountability; (5) multiple assessments; (6) capacity; and (7) the role of the district. The paper ends with a brief look at equity.

The Impact of State Policy on Local Policies and Practices[7]

The key policy drivers of standards-based reform are challenging standards of learning, coupled with assessments and accountability systems that encompass the same expectations for all students. This section looks at the effects that these state policies are having on schools and local school districts. An analysis of the first year of district and school level data from the CPRE study shows that:

1. Standards matter.
2. Well-developed state and/or local accountability systems create incentives for school and system improvement.
3. Particular kinds of district capacity facilitate local improvement efforts.

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[4] *Education Week* (1999, January 11). Quality Counts '99: Rewarding Results, Punishing Failures.

[5] AFT, *Making Standards Matter 1998*.

[6] The study was conducted by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE). The eight case study states are California, Colorado, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, and Texas, early adopters of standards-based reform. The 23 case studies are of two districts in California and three districts each in the other seven states. The districts are diverse, representing a range in size, race/ethnicity, urbanicity, and socio-economic status; however, districts were selected for their activism in school improvement and standards-based reform. In addition to district level interviews, researchers visited three elementary schools in each district, two of which participate in the federal Title I program. They also observed, interviewed and surveyed teachers in a sub-set of the schools. Information on state policy was obtained in 1996-97 and is continually updated. The district-level research was conducted in 1997-98 and in 1998-99.

[7] The section is based on a series of papers written by the author and her colleagues: Margaret E. Goertz, Diane Massell and Tammi Chun, "District Response to State Accountability Systems," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, New York, NY, October 1998; Diane Massell and Margaret E. Goertz, "Local Strategies for Building Capacity: The District Role in Supporting Instructional Reform," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, April 1999; and Margaret E. Goertz and Janet Kroll, "The Role of the State in Strengthening Title I Programs," paper presented at the National Invitational Conference on Effective Title I Schoolwide Program Implementation, Alexandria, VA, May 1999.

Standards matter.

The keystones of the standards-based reform movement are *content standards*, which are broad descriptions of the knowledge and skills students should acquire, and *performance standards*, which define and provide concrete examples of the desired levels of student achievement expected by the content standards.[8] Taken together, content and performance standards not only delineate what students should know and be able to do in specific areas, but should guide both instruction and assessments at the classroom, school, district, and state levels.

CPRE study districts located in states with well-established standards have developed or modified local standards so they are aligned with state policies. In the other states, districts have created their own standards that incorporate national models. These district standards set clear expectations for student achievement and guide curriculum development, school improvement planning, assessments, and professional development. Most of the districts require schools to develop improvement plans that identify school-level needs and strategies for achieving district goals. These plans are often used to identify teacher professional development needs, justify the expenditure of Title I and other discretionary funds, and/or plan curriculum and instruction.

Aligning curriculum and standards.

The Henrietta School District (HSD) is an example of a district that has used state learning outcomes to dramatically restructure its curriculum. In direct response to changes in state policy, HSD launched a five-year plan to align its curriculum to meet state expectations. Lengthy and highly specified curriculum guides provide standards, frameworks, and scope and sequences to the teachers. They contain a hierarchy of outcomes that run from state to county to grade level and finally to unit outcomes, with lesson indicators or essential learnings. They include resource guides for each grade level, and planning guides for each unit outcome. The language arts guide, for example, shows teachers how they might allocate their time and contains a sample year-long planning matrix of how to cover all the outcomes. It contains periodic running records and mid-year assessments where students respond to a reading activity and a writing prompt. The district is also developing assessments in language arts and mathematics to track individual student progress against district outcomes, and has adopted a recommended textbook in mathematics. Curriculum revision is accompanied by staff development linked to the emerging curriculum changes and school-based assistance for teachers as they make major changes in their instruction.

Nearly all of the study districts took steps to align their curriculum and instruction, both vertically to state standards and horizontally to other elements of district and school policies and programs.[9] For instance, in Minnesota, where the state's Graduation Standards will soon be coming into effect, one district developed a process called "sketching the standards" that analyzes all the components of a course to determine whether it fits state expectations. A district in another state required all their elementary and middle schools to use a computer-based instructional program focused on reading and mathematics to improve student performance. A third district initiated a district-wide reading program to address the increased requirements of its state's language arts standards, while other districts have adopted particular mathematics curricula, such as the University of Chicago School Mathematics Program, that they view as aligned with state standards. The districts do vary, however, in how they seek to build alignment – through changing curriculum, instruction, or

[8] Milbery W. McLaughlin, Lorrie A. Shepard, and Jennifer A. O'Day, *Improving Education through Standards-Based Reform.* A report by the National Academy of Education Panel on Standards-Based Education Reform. (Stanford, CA: The National Academy of Education, 1995).

[9] Alignment is not a new concern for districts. See, for example, Brian Rowan, Richard Edelstein, and Anita Leal , *Pathways to Excellence: What School Districts are Doing to Improve Instruction* (San Francisco, CA: Far West Laboratory, 1985). The few districts in the CPRE sample that did not express concern over alignment felt that it had already been achieved.

both. A Michigan district, for example, has a highly centralized mastery learning curriculum that identifies very specific grade level objectives in core subjects, has a single textbook series, and requires teachers to teach to mastery in the order given in district documents. One of the Texas study districts guides its language arts primarily by aligning professional development to a set of principles and standards and does not adopt textbooks.

Analysis and use of performance data.

One of the most striking trends across the CPRE study districts is the remarkably high level of attention paid to using data on student outcomes to inform decision-making. In the words of the superintendent of the Samantha School District:

> There has been a major change in the culture of the district. We are now a data-driven district. Data can be our best ally. It has not always been considered that way, but it is hard to dispute the data regarding student achievement. The data can be compiled in such a way to create a sense of urgency that I felt was necessary to bring about change.

This district places a strong emphasis on interpreting and using data. One of the main responsibilities of area superintendents is to assist each school with the development of their school improvement plan, and making sure that schools understand the state data. Instructional guides are housed at each school to help schools analyze and use data, among other things. Other central office staff, especially the testing division, provides a lot of support to schools on data interpretation.

All eight states in the CPRE study require or have incentives for some form of school improvement planning. Several states (e.g., Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Kentucky, and Texas) require the use of outcome data for school improvement planning, but districts and schools frequently go beyond the letter of the law in their use of this information. For example, one of the Colorado districts has its school identify at least one data analyst at its site. Some of these paid representatives are teachers, and some are parents. These individuals receive three years of data analysis training and are responsible for gathering and reporting on data for school improvement planning. The Office of Research and Evaluation in one Maryland district holds day-long meetings with four to five school teams at a time. They go through state test results item by item, looking at the number of students scoring at the different proficiency levels in each content area. They discuss progress over time, what it means to have students achieving at different levels, and what the outcome scores mean. The district administration holds schools accountable for basing their school improvement plans on these analyses. Another Maryland district created its own information management program that allows schools to access and use the state department of education's data files and merge them with school and student information. Most of the study districts train staff to provide schools with support in data analysis and interpretation, but several also hire outside experts.

Aligning standards and instruction.

State standards require not only that schools and districts change the content of their instruction, but that teachers change the core dimensions of their teaching – the knowledge represented in classroom tasks, classroom discourse patterns, and roles and responsibilities in the classroom.[10] To date, there has been limited research on the impact of state content and performance standards on classroom teaching and learning. Early studies suggest that teachers are making changes in the direction of the new standards, but they are not

[10] See, for example, Deborah L. Ball, "With an Eye on the Mathematical Horizon: Dilemmas of Teaching Elementary School Mathematics," *Elementary School Journal*, 1993, 93(4), 373-397; and M. Lampert, "When the Problem Is Not the Question and the Solution is Not the Answer: Mathematical Knowing and Teaching," *American Educational Research Journal*, 1990, 27(1), 29-63.

as deep or extensive as reformers expect. For example, a 1995 statewide survey of Kentucky and Maryland teachers and administrators found that a majority of the respondents supported the thrust of their states' reforms and they reported that their states' policies had changed their instruction. Teachers were devoting more instructional time to writing, analysis of text and literary comprehension in language arts, and less on spelling and grammar. Similarly, in mathematics they reported placing more emphasis on communicating mathematical ideas, problem-solving and data analysis and less on computation.[11] More qualitative studies of teacher instruction in these and other states found similar patterns.[12] This research revealed, however, that while many teachers changed the structure and content of their classroom activities, they did not necessarily change the core of their instructional practice. In mathematics, for example, teachers used new tasks to teach procedural knowledge (e.g., computational procedures in mathematics), rather than the key mathematical ideas and concepts that can be used to construct procedures for solving mathematical problems.[13] Teachers were familiar with the themes of reform but were unwilling or unable to incorporate the key features of these reforms in their practice.

Accountability systems create incentives for improvement.

Standards are designed to establish expectations for what students should know and be able to do. Accountability systems provide the information (through assessments and other measures of student performance) and the incentives (through rewards and sanctions) for educators to strive to meet these expectations.

Expanding on state accountability systems.

Like states, districts are also holding schools accountable for meeting district and/or state standards. But the expectations and consequences of district accountability systems vary. In the CPRE sites, districts' accountability systems often reflect differences in the design of their state accountability systems. In Maryland and Kentucky, for example, where the state has established challenging content standards and performance goals, districts hold their schools accountable for meeting state standards. None of the districts we visited in these states had enacted any sanctions beyond the state's. However, two districts have supplemented the state's reward program to recognize schools that are making some progress against state goals. In Texas, many schools already meet the less rigorous state standards. Thus, some districts are setting higher goals, such as having all their schools be in the "recognized" or "exemplary" categories (which require more students to pass the state assessment and higher attendance and lower dropout rates) or having all students graduate from high school prepared to enter a four-year college. In California, where the state assessment and accountability system has been in flux, the two study sites have developed their own

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[11] D. Koretz, S. Barron, K. J. Mitchell, and B. M. Stecher, *Perceived Effects of the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1996); D. Koretz, K. J. Mitchell, S. Barron, and S. Keith. *Perceived Effects of the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program* (Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing, 1996).

[12] *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 1990, 12(3); Margaret E. Goertz, Robert Floden and Jennifer O'Day, *Studies of Education Reform: Systemic Reform. Volume I: Findings and Conclusions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1995); Lorraine McDonnell and C. Choisser, *Testing and Teaching: Local Implementation of New State Assessments* (Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing, 1997); Patrick Shields, J. Marsh and Nancy Adelman, *Evaluation of NSF's Statewide Systemic Initiatives (SSI) Program: The SSIs' Impacts on Classroom Practice* (Menlo Park, CA: SRI International, 1998); and James P. Spillane and John Zeuli, "Reform and Teaching: Exploring Patterns of Practice in the Context of National and State Mathematics Reforms," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 1999, 21(1), 1-27.

[13] Spillane and Zeuli, "Reform and Teaching;" William A. Firestone, David Mayrowetz, and Janet Fairman, "Performance-Based Assessment and Instructional Change: The Effects of Testing in Maine and Maryland" *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 1998, 20(2), 95-113.

accountability systems, with goals to bring 90 percent of their students to a proficient level. Schools that exceed district expectations in one of these districts receive rewards; those that fail to improve could be reconstituted. The other district has implemented a no social promotion policy at grades 3 and 8. Several districts in the study evaluate principals on whether their schools meet goals set in school improvement plans or if their students meet the state's or district's performance standards. In one of these sites, principals who achieve these goals are given a multi-year contract, while those who do not meet the goal in three years may be reassigned to another school.

These comprehensive accountability systems create incentives for school and school system improvement by focusing attention on student outcomes and progress, providing data for decision-making, and creating a press for more and better measures of student performance. Research is showing that the positive and negative consequences of accountability systems motivate school staff to work in more focused ways on state and district goals.[14] Teachers view monetary incentives as an important symbol to the public of a job well done; negative outcomes include pressure and stress to improve results and fear of being labeled as a "school in decline" and the accompanying professional embarrassment. As a principal in one of our districts noted:

> [The state assessment program] has probably been driving everything we've done. You can say you're doing it to raise students' achievement. To be honest, you're doing it because of accountability and assessment. I don't know if the whole accountability piece with rewards and sanctions is still the deal. It was at the beginning. Now it's a matter of pride. Before, we didn't want the scores to slip; now it's self-examination. Without the state assessment, I don't think that would have come into play. We may have been able to make some changes, maybe start some good things, but the degree and speed we have changed never would have happened.

State and district accountability systems provide not only the "will" but the information needed to initiate reforms. As discussed in the preceding section, districts are paying unprecedented attention to data, even in states with weak and relatively low stakes accountability systems. Districts and schools are using the data for many purposes: for identifying the kinds of professional development activities that might help address gaps in performance; for planning curriculum and instruction; for assigning personnel, and for developing remedial programs or plans for students. A Texas district, for example, identifies students who performed poorly on a local "mock TAAS" for additional support; other districts used the data to identify teachers for remedial professional development classes in the particular subject matter where their students performed poorly. In one of the California study districts, teachers built action research projects in their classrooms around student performance data, and were involved in study groups. In the other California district, teachers wanted the data themselves to help improve their teaching.

As the conversation about school improvement becomes informed by an understanding of the data about students' learning, educators and district staff are pressing for more and better data on multiple measures of student achievement. Such an approach is clearly seen in Leona, an early reform district. Because of a desire to use student achievement data for program evaluation and system improvement, the district supplements the state's assessment and accountability system with multiple indicators of student progress. These include running records, a benchmark book program for early literacy, performance writing tasks, and performance assessments in mathematics. Each student is given a "global proficiency rating" based on standardized test scores as well as performance assessments in mathematics and literacy. Each school receives annual reports indicating the percent of students meeting state and district standards on

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[14] Carolyn Kelley, Anthony Milanowski, and Herbert G. Heneman, III, "Changing Teacher Compensation: Cross-Site Analysis of the Effects of School-Based Performance Awards Programs," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA, April 1998.

multiple measures; the district goal is 90 percent global proficiency in each school. In at least two of the district's three regions, regional superintendents require principals to collect data on student achievement in their school and to engage in some form of action research.

A growing focus on continuous student improvement.

Other districts in the CPRE study also extended student testing beyond their state's assessment system. Two of the three Kentucky districts added district testing: one administers the CAT-5 to most grades; another administers school-selected reading and mathematics tests three times a year. Two of the Maryland districts use both district-designed end of unit tests and teacher-generated running records to measure student progress against district goals (which are aligned with state goals). The Texas districts were less likely to administer additional local tests, possibly because the state assessment covers nearly all grades. One district, however, developed district tests to measure student performance on its more rigorous and comprehensive district standards. While a major purpose of district assessments was to measure the continuous progress of students toward district and/or state goals, and to provide instructional feedback to teachers and schools, other reasons for district testing activity emerged. These included: providing information on individual students for parents, teachers and/or special programs identification (e.g., special education); providing external validation of student performance, especially in the basic skills areas, through the use of national, norm-referenced assessments; evaluating programs such as Title I, state compensatory education, gifted and talented, and vocational education; and reinforcing the form and language of performance assessments in instruction in an effort to bridge the gap between assessment and instruction.

How do we move from data to real reform?

Although state and district assessments and accountability systems are focusing schools on student performance and state and local goals, most educators are having difficulty linking assessment results to needed improvements in curriculum and instruction. A major challenge is helping schools identify needed instructional programs and professional development and helping teachers connect test results to classroom practices. As one of our respondents noted:

> One of our biggest challenges right now in the district, I think, is to help schools look at student achievement indicators and try and connect them back to what are they doing, what aren't they doing...to really help them understand how to look at data, how to look at student work, how to interpret. We have sent schools multitudes of pages of data over the years, but we have not, I don't think, done a very good job with our district in helping them understand what to do with it when they got it.

Particular kinds of district capacity facilitate local improvement efforts.

As this quotation illustrates, clearly defined learning outcomes and aligned assessment and accountability systems are necessary but will not be sufficient to change teaching and learning in ways that foster continuous improvement in student learning. Accountability systems do not address the capacity of teachers and schools to respond to new reforms. Their design assumes that either schools already possess the "skill" but not the "will" to meet goals; or that once goals are made clear and consequences are attached to them, schools will look for or find the capacity they need to meet the goals.[15]

The CPRE study found that districts play a critical role in building the capacity of teachers and schools.

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[15] Susan H. Fuhrman, *The New Accountability*, CPRE Policy Brief No. RB-27. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, Consortium for Policy Research in Education, January 1999).

The study districts used a mix of five capacity-building strategies: enhancing teacher professionalism; curriculum reform aligned to state standards; the use of data to identify needs and select strategies for improvement; school empowerment, and assistance targeted on low-performing schools.

Enhancing teacher professionalism.

Nearly all the districts regarded the building of teachers' knowledge and skills as a crucial component of their change process, and every district provides some form of support for professional training. Specific approaches ranged from traditional workshops, to the modeling of lessons by master teachers, to the development of action research projects and teaching standards. While menu-driven workshops are still prevalent in these districts, there was a growing use of nontraditional forms of professional training and support – learning communities, on-site support, and teacher participation in policy development.

The Leona School District, for example, focused its teacher development on the creation of what it calls a "learning community." Rather than the usual bundle of isolated and unrelated workshop offerings, this district offers a series of extensive courses and workshops in literacy and mathematics over a two-year period. Classes are oriented towards instruction in the content areas and to district standards and goals, rather than tied to a specific textbook or curriculum package. Teachers are also encouraged to become consumers of professional literature through study groups and to engage in action research in their schools.[16]

Other districts are increasing the level of site-based support as follow-up to traditional professional development offerings. One approach entails assigning master teachers on a full-time basis to one or a group of schools to model lessons, mentor teachers in implementing instructional programs and approaches, and direct teachers to more information on good instructional practice. In some sites, these teachers also assist school improvement teams in interpreting and using student performance data. Another approach is to designate regularly-assigned classroom teachers to provide ongoing support to their colleagues on specific innovations, such as new curriculum or textbooks, the change process, and how to promote professional development.

Teacher participation in the development of district curriculum and assessments, the selection of textbooks, or the creation of other policy initiatives was also a regular feature of districts' efforts to build the capacity of their teaching staff, as well as a way for them to expand their own manpower to accomplish central goals. A Colorado district developed a cadre of teachers to lead their summer professional development institute. At these institutes, teachers are strongly engaged in doing, rather than passively listening – they spend a majority of their time planning and developing instructional materials, such as curriculum maps, rubrics, unit organizers, and classroom assessments linked to district standards. The district also provides time and resources outside of the school year for teachers to learn about standards-based instruction and to plan and network with each other.

Curriculum reform aligned to state standards.

Like the focus on teacher knowledge and skills, districts are heavily vested in curriculum and instruction as a major key to improvement. It is part of the regular repertoire of district action, as is the concept of alignment. An example of how one district, the Henrietta School District, aligned its curriculum with state standards was presented earlier. This district used the development and implementation of a district-wide curriculum aligned to state standards as its central capacity-building strategy. Curriculum guidance by districts, however, can be a patchwork of both loose and tight central controls. Interestingly, this often varies by subject matter, with stronger central direction typically in mathematics. For instance, one of the Michigan

[16] This approach draws on a model of professional development designed and implemented by Anthony Alvarado in District #2 in New York City. For a description of the District #2 model, see Richard Elmore, with Deanna Burney, *Investing in Teacher Learning: Staff Development and Instructional Improvement in Community School District #2, New York City*. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future and the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1997.

study districts uses an instructional method in language arts called Reading/Writing Workshop,[17] and provides teachers with funds to select their own trade books for reading. But it does adopt a textbook series in elementary mathematics because it wants continuity there. Several other districts have a specified mathematics curriculum but give schools greater flexibility in language arts. However, some districts are moving to assert more guidance over formerly decentralized language arts curricula and instruction because of lagging performance on state assessments and teachers' confusion over how to achieve a balance between whole language and more traditional phonics approaches. Indeed, this "balance" theme in language arts emerged strongly in a majority of the districts.

Districts are also making strategic choices about whether and where to centralize curriculum and instruction in response to changing characteristics of their teacher or student populations. More mobile student populations have led some districts to recentralize or try to forge some common curriculum. In one Kentucky district, where schools have complete authority over curriculum and instruction by state mandate, schools and even classrooms used different materials. Student transfers were suffering. To address this problem, the district began negotiating with schools to identify common textbooks. Changes in the teaching force also have influenced what materials some districts select. For example, many new teachers don't know how to mix a phonetic approach with whole language. Therefore, these districts are selecting materials that, in the words of one curriculum specialist, "are supportive enough of people who may not have all the skills they need to teach in a variety of ways."

Finally, some districts supplement state assessments to align instructional practices and curriculum to state or district goals and to prepare students and teachers for what would be expected of them on the district or state assessments. Several of the study districts require their teachers to administer classroom-embedded assessments developed by teachers and then score them using a district rubric. As classroom tools, these assessments are intended to influence teachers' instruction and to incorporate the language and form of performance-based assessment more into the routine of schooling. In some cases, districts hope that these tasks will better familiarize students with state testing language and formats.

The use of data.

Earlier in this paper, we showed how districts were using student performance data to inform school plans. Related to its emphasis on using data for planning and decision-making, the Samantha School District (profiled above) is also strongly committed to using research-based instructional approaches. The district adopted basic guidelines for the selection of any new curriculum that require the curriculum to be research-based, standards-based, have an evaluation and professional development component, and have a bilingual component. So, for example, when a study on the University of Chicago School Mathematics Program (UCSMP) found that it was one of the few programs that reflected high standards and was correlated with its state and national standards, the district mandated the program for all schools. It did so despite the fact that UCSMP was not on the state materials adoption list, incurring a considerable expense. The impetus towards initiatives grounded in research also led the district to become a New American Schools (NAS) jurisdiction. The district offers schools a financial incentive ($50,000 per school) to participate in a NAS design.

School empowerment.

A fourth capacity-building strategy used by some of our districts is school empowerment: the path to improvement through enabling schools to make their own choices. Here districts give schools almost exclusive control over budget decisions and substantial authority over personnel and professional development. The schools also select their own approach to curriculum and instruction. In one study district, the district decided not to establish district-level standards or assessments in order to give schools

[17] While Reading/Writing Workshop is now a districtwide initiative, it did begin as a grassroots movement among teachers. This district became particularly interested in this approach when it became a pilot site for the state language arts curriculum framework and saw it as a way of aligning with the state.

greater flexibility and discretion. Schools are held accountable instead for performance on state standards. In keeping with this philosophy, the superintendent reorganized the central office to highlight the importance of serving the client, referring here to the principal. The district operates with a "rule of no": since the principal is viewed as the key individual for improving academic performance, the only person in the district office who can say "no" to a principal is the superintendent. The district also downsized its central office and redistributed the savings to the schools.

Focusing on low-performing schools.

A final key component of most of the study districts' improvement efforts was to target capacity-building efforts on low-performing schools and students as identified by state or local assessments and accountability systems. District efforts here took several forms. A few of the districts developed explicit strategies tying school-site autonomy to performance on state and occasionally district measures. For example, one Texas district that has been decentralizing authority over curriculum and instruction and giving schools real authority over their budgets put the brakes on schools that they defined as poorly performing on the Texas accountability index. As a result, the lowest performing schools must obtain central office approval for their activities. Several districts mandated or encouraged schools to adopt certain instructional strategies to address weak performance on state or local assessments. These instructional strategies included some version of Reading Recovery, writing across the curriculum, or the adoption of nationally recognized whole school reform models. Districts also made more staff and resources available to low-performing schools. Several districts assigned master teachers or "coaches," as well as additional instructional staff, such as reading specialists, to these schools. Some districts also required or encouraged low-performing schools to network with other schools to foster ideas and strategies for improving performance. The Maryland State Department of Education, for example, facilitates this networking by pairing high-achieving, Blue Ribbon Title I schools with struggling schools of comparable demographics and by helping other schools make their own matches through data provided on the state web site.

Implications for State Policy

Seven design and implementation issues emerge from our analysis of district response to state standards-based reform policies, other research, and CPRE's on-going analysis of the state policies themselves. They concern: (1) policy stability; (2) policy strength; (3) policy guidance; (4) multiple points of accountability; (5) multiple assessments; (6) capacity; and (7) the role of the district.

Policy Stability – "This Too Shall Pass"

The first prerequisite for effective state policy is stability. Changes in state content standards and/or state assessment and accountability systems complicate the process of reform. Frequent changes in these requirements contribute to the notion that "this (policy) too shall pass," delegitimizing the policies as a source of instructional guidance, and reducing the incentive for local districts to respond with curricular and instructional changes. Some changes are a necessary consequence of the evolution of reform, such as the review and revision of state standards and/or the development of new assessments aligned to these standards. More problematic for teachers, schools, and school districts are the politically driven changes in state policies. In the eight states included in the CPRE study, controversies have emerged around three broad issues: (1) the content of state standards; (2) the content and/or format of the state assessment; and (3) consequences of test performance for students and schools.

Three of the study states (including Texas and California, two that were standards-based reform pioneers) recently revised their mathematics and English/language arts standards. In all three cases, the debates were

acrimonious, reflecting conflict between those who support a basic-skills emphasis and/or traditional instructional approaches and those who support more hands-on, problem solving-oriented teaching.[18] California made major changes in its mathematics, science, and language arts standards, placing more emphasis on procedural mathematics and on the teaching of phonemic awareness, decoding, and spelling as explicit and discrete skills. It also now requires teacher and professional development programs to include instruction in a skill-based approach to reading. The business and scientific communities in Michigan and Texas successfully opposed major changes to standards in their states. In fact, business has played a major role in maintaining support for, and therefore stabilizing, standards-based reforms in these and other states, such as Maryland.[19]

Decisions about testing design and administration are also political choices, subject to debate. In some states, the use of essays and other non-multiple choice items have been criticized as "subjective." Other states have increased their use of multiple-choice items in order to produce individual student scores and increase the reliability of their assessment systems. Testing time and burden are also contentious issues since educators, legislators, and parents often view time spent testing students as detracting from instructional time. As a result, legislatures in three of the study states limited testing time for their assessments. Responding to the burden in the tested grades, Kentucky restructured its assessment so that subject-area assessments are divided across two grades per grade interval, rather than administered in one. Michigan limited testing time for its high school tests, and test specifications in Colorado set a time limit of six 45-minute class periods (for a total of 4½ hours) per student. Test burden will continue to be a topic on the political agenda as districts supplement state assessments with their own tests, and as parents and policymakers call for assessments that yield reliable individual scores.

State assessments attract increased public and legislative scrutiny and criticism when high stakes are attached to test results. Concern over the consequences of more difficult tests for students has slowed the development of new high school tests aligned with higher standards in Maryland. Diploma endorsements were delayed and changed in Michigan in response to parental protests. The Wisconsin legislature has balked at funding their state's planned high school graduation test. Minnesota split its graduation exam into two components: a battery of basic skills tests required for graduation and administered when entering high school; and portfolios that measure performance on the more challenging Profile of Learning standards. Only a portion of the latter assessment is mandatory.

Policy Strength – Must We Listen?

The ability of state standards-based reforms to drive changes in teaching and learning depends in part on the strength of state policies. Policy strength is a function of the authority or legitimacy, power, consistency, and prescriptiveness of the policy.[20] As discussed above, stability contributes to the legitimacy of state policy. Policies that are aligned with professional norms about teaching and learning and/or reflect a community's consensus about their content tend to be more authoritative as well. Power rests with rewards for compliance and sanctions for non-compliance with a policy. Consistency is the degree to which the policies push in the same direction and are aligned with a common vision of reform. Prescriptiveness refers to the extent to which the policy gives clear and detailed guidance to the user.

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[18] The February 1999 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan* presents arguments from both sides of the "math wars."

[19] David Grissmer and Ann Flanagan, *Exploring Rapid Achievement Gains in North Carolina and Texas.* (Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel, 1998).

[20] A. Porter, R. Floden, D. Freeman, W. Schmidt and J. Schwille, "Content Determinants in Elementary School Mathematics," in *Perspectives on Research on Effective Mathematics Teaching*, eds. D. A. Grouws and T. J. Cooney (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1988), 96-113, as cited in William Clune, *Toward a Theory of Systemic Reform: The Case of Nine NSF Statewide Systemic Initiatives*, Research Monograph No. 16 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, National Center for Improving Science Education, 1998).

States vary considerably in the strength of their standards-based reform systems, reflecting differences in their political cultures. A tradition of strong local control limits state authority in many states. In many of these places, state content standards are only "model" standards; districts are allowed to adopt their own standards. Kansas provides an example here. Although the State Board of Education recently removed most references to evolution from the state's new science standards, districts are free to set their own curriculum standards and thus continue to teach evolution. In some of these states, however, state standards are incorporated in state assessments, providing an incentive for districts to align their curriculum with state objectives.

But districts will pay serious attention to state assessments only if consequences are attached to poor student performance on these tests. Thus, the power of standards-based reform policies is determined in large part by the design of the accountability system, particularly the measures of progress that get rewarded or sanctioned, who sets what goals for the system, and the consequences of meeting (or not meeting) these goals. State accountability systems vary in all of these dimensions. For example, states may measure annual student progress as a fixed, set amount for all schools, or as a relative amount of gain based on each school's past performance and, perhaps, distance from state goals. States such as Florida and Texas use absolute measures of progress; that is, performance thresholds that all schools must pass to demonstrate satisfactory progress. The incentive to improve provided by absolute measures depends on how high the target is set, and how rigorous are the assessments used to measure whether schools and districts have met this target. While absolute measures focus on achieving states' school performance goals, the use of relative criteria emphasizes continuous yearly improvement. Unlike fixed measures, relative measures of annual progress generally demand improvement in both low- and high-performing schools.

Not all states hold schools and/or school districts accountable for the attainment of state-established performance goals. States with strong traditions of local control have developed accountability systems that emphasize local standards and local reporting (e.g. Nebraska), or that use state-approved district plans to hold districts accountable for improving student performance on both district and state standards (e.g., Colorado and Pennsylvania). These weaker state accountability policies provide fewer incentives and less state guidance for improving student achievement, school performance, and district performance. As a result, the nature of the accountability system is determined by the district. California and Colorado provide some examples. While the Colorado districts in the CPRE study were reform leaders, none had developed strong accountability systems on their own, nor had they developed any formal interventions for low-performing schools. In contrast, the two California study districts were implementing comprehensive standards-based assessment and accountability systems, complete with a system of rewards, sanctions, and support.

Finally, states attach different consequences to their general accountability systems. These consequences range from the public reporting of student, school, and school district performance that are intended to generate parental and public pressure for reform ("low stakes" accountability), to state intervention in school and district governance ("high stakes" for school systems), and/or withholding high school diplomas ("high stakes" for students). High-stakes state accountability systems carry with them more incentives to change, while low-stakes accountability systems depend more upon local districts to define and carry out reform.

Policy Guidance – What Should We Do?

Another component of policy strength is prescriptiveness, and there are ongoing debates about how detailed state standards should be in order to guide curricular and instructional change in schools. This debate reflects philosophical differences over who should write curriculum (teachers and schools versus the state) and political tensions over the appropriate balance of state and local control in education. Some reformers argue, for example, that states should set broad goals and give schools and districts the flexibility they need to construct locally responsive curricula within the framework of state goals. Others judge the

quality of state standards by their clarity, specificity, and content coverage.[21] While national subject matter organizations have established benchmarks at transition grades (e.g., grades 4, 8 and 11 or 12), other organizations argue that states need to set standards at every grade.

Many states have developed standards documents at a fairly broad level of detail. This approach satisfied political and legal constraints that prohibited many states from mandating local curriculum. Indeed, policymakers in some states felt they could not even advise local schools and districts about suitable curriculum. Teachers and districts frequently complain, however, that state standards are too general to effectively guide local curriculum and instruction, and that district and school staff did not have the time or expertise to translate these broad goals into practice.[22] Kentucky is a case in point, where the State Department of Education has had to provide increasingly detailed instructional guidance in response to teachers' demands. The state's most recent document, a web-based *Implementation Manual for the Program of Studies*, gives teachers a framework for designing both interdisciplinary and discipline-based curriculum models that incorporate required content.[23]

California has published curriculum and program advisories; its reading program advisory described the rationale and research base underlying its new standards, and included grade-level expectations, examples of classroom practice, and a sample timeline for reading curriculum from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. Other ways in which states have addressed this "curriculum gap" are discussed later on.

Multiple Points of Accountability – Holding Everyone Accountable

Standards-based reform marked a shift in the focus of accountability from the district and student to the school. We are seeing a return to student accountability, however, as well as the emergence of individual teacher accountability in many states and communities, thus expanding the scope of accountability systems. As discussed in the following section, this movement to hold everyone accountable has major implications for the design and use of state and local assessments.

State assessment and accountability systems developed in the 1970s typically focused on the performance of individual students and used assessment data to identify students in need of remedial services. They also held districts accountable for educational inputs and process standards, such as the number of certified staff and books in the library and compliance with federal and state regulations. The new accountability systems that emerged in the 1990s were designed to focus less on compliance monitoring at the district level and more on the process of teaching and learning at the school level. Two beliefs underlie this shift: (1) student performance is cumulative and influenced by the entire school; and (2) a system of collective responsibility will encourage school staff to work collaboratively to improve student performance.[24] Some reformers also felt that a student-based accountability system "blamed the victim," rather than the system, for failure.

The new school-based accountability system has four key features:

- Schools and not students are held accountable for student achievement.
- Since schools are held accountable as a unit, it is not necessary to test students at every grade.

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[21] See, for example, AFT, *Making Standards Matter 1998*; Chester E. Finn, Jr., Michael J. Petrilli, and Gregg Vanourek, *The State of State Standards* (Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 1998); *Great Expectations? Defining and Assessing Rigor in State Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts* (Council for Basic Education, 1998).

[22] Diane Massell, *State Strategies for Building Local Capacity: Addressing the Needs of Standards-Based Reform*, CPRE Policy Brief No. RB-25. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, Consortium for Policy Research in Education, July 1998).

[23] *Http://www.kde.state.ky.us/comm/commrel/cats/*

[24] Jennifer O'Day, with Bethany Gross, "One System or Two? Title I Accountability in the Context of High Stakes for Schools in Local Districts and States." unpublished manuscript. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1998).

- School accountability does not require measures of individual student performance. Therefore, states and districts can use matrix sampling to generate reliable measures of group performance on performance-based tasks without untenable test burden.
- Rewards and sanctions will be directed at the school, not the student.

Many state systems incorporated these features into their accountability systems; only a few states like Texas continued to test every student in every grade. Within a few years, however, parents and politicians began clamoring for individual student scores, which matrix sampling does not provide. A major criticism of the now-defunct California Learning Assessment System (CLAS) test was its lack of individual results; subsequent legislation made individual test results a mandatory component of any California state test. In 1997 on the eve of their tests' implementation, Colorado's political leaders switched their statewide testing design from a matrix sample with district-level results to assessing every student in the tested grade level and providing individualized results. Teachers also began looking for systematic ways to measure individual student progress during the school year. As noted in an earlier section of this paper, the use of local assessments began to proliferate.

At the same time, educators and policymakers began to question the lack of student incentives in state accountability systems. Education is co-produced. Teachers' success is dependent on students' efforts in school, but there was nothing in the accountability system to motivate students to take the tests seriously, especially in secondary schools. Nor were there any consequences for students who performed poorly on the tests. Thus, several states and school districts have enacted promotion gates: students cannot progress to the next grade (often at transition points like fourth grade) if they do not meet district or state performance standards. But this kind of student accountability requires assessments that produce reliable scores at the individual level, something that is not possible in many state assessment systems. States and districts are also beginning to develop policies for holding individual teachers, as well as schools, accountable for student progress, but it is not clear what kinds of measures will be used and how much weight will be placed on student performance.[25]

Multiple Assessments – One Test Does Not Fit All

As states and localities expand the scope of their accountability systems, and as teachers and districts supplement state assessments to meet classroom and district needs, we must stop and take stock of state and local assessment systems. Policy makers expect one assessment system to serve multiple purposes. These purposes include providing indicators of the performance of the education system, holding schools and educators accountable for their performance, certifying student performance as students move from grade to grade or out of the K-12 education system, motivating students to perform better and teachers to change their instructional content and strategies, and aiding in instructional decisions about individual students.[26]

Assessment experts, however, question whether one test, no matter what the format, can address these multiple needs. For example, scores on assessments that are best suited for classroom instruction, such as portfolios, are difficult to aggregate on a district basis for accountability purposes. Performance-based and open-response items are better suited than multiple choice tests in measuring complex skills and understanding. But, for a test of equal testing time, multiple choice tests produce more reliable scores for individual students. In order to generate more reliable individual scores on performance assessments, more

[25] A pilot pay-for-performance program in Denver will test the use of three different measures of student performance: student scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, scores on district-developed assessments, and changes in student performance after teachers have taken classes to improve their skills. "Denver Teachers Accept Plan Linking Pay to Performance," *New York Times* (September 12, 1999), p. 35.

[26] Lorraine M. McDonnell, *Policymakers' Views of Student Assessment* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1994).

items must be administered – greatly expanding testing time – or a mix of performance-based and multiple choice items must be used. Students do not have to be assessed annually to hold schools accountable for their performance, but they must be tested regularly if they are the target of the accountability system.

Some states and districts have addressed this dilemma by implementing multiple assessments with different formats and content coverage. This situation, however, sends mixed messages to teachers about what and how they should teach and what they will be held accountable for. This tension was seen in the two California study sites after the state implemented the Stanford-9 (SAT-9) as a transitional state assessment. Respondents were worried that results from the SAT-9 would receive attention at the expense of other district measures, such as portfolio assessments. The format of the assessment was also seen as moving in a different direction from prior state, and current district, reform efforts.

In the words of the National Research Council's Committee on Appropriate Test Use:

> The challenge for the policy community…is to make decisions about test use that allow them to pursue their broader objectives within a constrained political environment, staying mindful of both the limitations of any given test and its capacity to influence classroom behavior and students' educational opportunity… Policymakers must also ensure that tests measure student performance consistently across tasks (reliability), that the scores are meaningful and reflect the domains being measured (validity), and that the meaning of the test scores does not differ across individuals, groups, or settings (fairness).[27]

Capacity – The Missing Piece in Standards-Based Reform[28]

The districts described in this paper are not representative of districts across their states or across the country. They are "active users" of state policy; that is, they act in advance of the passage of state policies or respond to new policies in a way that exceeds the minimum required of them.[29] An enduring question is how to build the capacity of less pro-active districts. Research on capacity-building policies in eight states has identified the following promising strategies.

Locating assistance closer to schools.

State departments of education have worked to create decentralized support systems involving a wide range of actors. They have taken these steps in the belief that individuals and organizations that work directly with schools may be better positioned to offer the kinds of specific and sustained support that can yield real improvements. Early findings from an evaluation of Kentucky's Distinguished Educator (DE) Program supports this claim; 63 percent of the schools that had DEs achieved significant gains in student achievement.[30]

Professional networks.

States nurtured or relied upon professional networks of teachers and other education experts of schools and of districts to develop local capacity for reform. One kind of network, such as the California Subject-Matter Projects, focused on improving the skills of those who participate in them. A second kind, such as

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[27] Jay P. Heubert and Robert M. Hauser, eds., *High Stakes Testing for Tracking, Promotion and Graduation* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999), 33, 39.

[28] This section is drawn from Massell, *State Strategies for Building Local Capacity.*

[29] Susan H. Fuhrman, William H. Clune, and Richard E. Elmore, "Research on Education Reform: Lessons on Implementation," *Teachers College Record*, 90, 237-257.

[30] M. Davis, D. McDonald, and B. Lyons. *A Preliminary Analysis of the Kentucky Distinguished Educator Initiative: a New Approach to Educational Change.* (Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Department of Education, 1997), as cited in Massell, *State Strategies for Building Local Capacity: Addressing the Needs of Standards-Based Reform.*

Kentucky's DEs and Minnesota's Best Practice Network, trained and deployed a cadre of experts to offer direct support to schools. A third type of network developed and distributed specific products, such as sample lessons and/or assessment tasks (e.g., the Maryland Assessment Consortium).

Curriculum guidance.

States responded to local requests for more specific curriculum guidance by providing access to curriculum materials and distributing curriculum frameworks that included examples of standards-based instruction and high performance. Several states began considering curriculum-specific professional development. Research studies show that professional development that is closely connected to curriculum content impact both teacher practice and student achievement positively.[31]

Professional development standards.

State departments of education are developing professional development and training standards as ways of policing and improving the quality of teacher preparation and training in their states. The Maryland Board of Education, for example, adopted the standards of the National Staff Development Council as an interim step in developing its own professional development standards. States applied these standards in awarding grants or as target program components (e.g., evaluating Goals 2000 plans). They also developed quality criteria for evaluating professional development activities or for including professional development providers on approved state lists.

Continuing challenges.

States face several challenges as they implement these capacity-building strategies, however. These include: insuring that the external organizations providing assistance to schools and districts have sufficient human and fiscal capacity; addressing the needs of middle-performing schools; providing incentives for schools and districts to follow state professional development standards; encouraging institutions of higher education to improve their teacher training programs, and for teachers to pursue professional development.

Role of Districts – The Missing Link

The new accountability approaches adopted by states and the federal government, coupled with a growing focus on site-based decision making, call into question the traditional relationship between schools and their districts. Student performance data are now collected and reported at the school level, and states may intervene directly in the operation of low-performing schools regardless of how the district defines its responsibilities regarding school performance. Some states, like Kentucky, allow parents to transfer their children out of low-performing schools; students who attend failing schools in Florida may receive vouchers to attend other schools. The New Jersey State Department of Education now has the authority to approve school improvement plans and school-site budgets in the state's 30 poor urban school districts. Strong site-based decision-making laws, charter schools, and a push for school-selected whole school reform programs have the potential to further erode districts' legal authority and control, and reflect a skepticism about the ability of districts to play a constructive role in instructional improvement.

In an increasingly decentralized system, who has the responsibility and the capacity to help schools improve? States have limited resources to assist schools directly, and yet most schools lack the resources or

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[31] See, for example, David Cohen and Heather Hill, *State Policy and Classroom Performance: Mathematics Reform in California.* CPRE Policy Brief No. RB-23. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1998); Thomas B. Corcoran, Patrick M. Shield, and Andrew A. Zucker, *Evaluation of NSF's Statewide Systemic Initiatives (SSI) Program: The SSIs' and Professional Development* (Menlo Park, CA: SRI International, 1998); and Shields, Marsh and Adelman, *The SSIs' Impact on Classroom Practice.*

capacity to tackle reform on their own. What problems are best addressed by a school and its community and which can and should be solved through collective action? Perhaps it is time to shift the debate from: "What is the appropriate balance of power between schools and districts?" to "What are the most effective district strategies for supporting school change?"

On Equity

The primary goal of standards-based reform is high achievement for **all** children. States develop a common set of academic standards for all students and then hold schools and districts accountable for ensuring that all students meet these standards. These efforts are supported by new requirements in the two largest federal education programs – Title I of Improving America's Schools Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

States face many challenges in realizing the goal of high standards for all students. Three are briefly highlighted here.

States must measure, report and hold schools and school districts accountable for all students. If all students, particularly those with special needs, are to benefit from standards-based reform, they must be included in the system's assessment and accountability programs. Without this kind of public accounting, schools and teachers have fewer incentives to address the needs of low-performing students. States have brought their Title I students into their statewide assessment and accountability programs, but have not come as far in including students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency. A few states, such as Kentucky, require that all students be included in their state assessments and that their scores be included in school accountability indices, but many states leave this decision up to IEP teams. There is a severe shortage of research on the assessment of students with disabilities, so test developers and policymakers lack the information they need to create tests and report results that are valid, reliable, and appropriate for this population.[32] Policymakers also face resistance to including academically low-performing students in assessments used for school accountability. Few states assess second language learners in their primary language; many face the challenge of developing assessments for multiple languages.

Many state accountability systems are not designed to bring ALL students up to state standards. Accountability systems in many states do not make the achievement of poor and low-achieving students a high priority.[33] Most systems are designed to measure the continuous progress of *schools*, not individual *students*. Measures that focus on the performance of the student body as a group mask performance gaps among subgroups of students. Thus basing rewards and sanctions on the performance of the student body as a whole does not provide a direct incentive for schools to reduce achievement gaps among subgroups of students, such as differences in performance across race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status. While the federal Title I program requires states to report students' assessment results by subgroup, only one state – Texas – holds schools accountable for the performance of groups of students. If any subgroup of students (by grade, race/ethnicity, low-income) within a school does not meet the building's annual goal, the school is subject to sanctions under Texas' accountability system.

In addition to overlooking the performance of student *subgroups*, state policies may leave the *lowest-performing* students behind under current measures of adequate yearly progress and performance targets. For

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[32] Lorraine McDonnell, Margaret McLaughlin, and Patricia Morison, eds. *Educating One and All: Students with Disabilities and Standards-based Reform.* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1997).

[33] Tammi J. Chun and Margaret E. Goertz, "Title I and State Education Policy: High Standards for All Students?" In G. Orfield and E. DeBray (eds.), *Hard Work for Good Schools: Facts Not Fads in Title I Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, The Civil Rights Project), 120-129.

example, a Maryland school can meet the state's K-8 goals (70 percent of students scoring "satisfactory" on the Maryland State Performance Assessment Program) even if 30 percent of students in the school have less than satisfactory scores. In Florida at grade 3, schools can satisfy their state's requirements even if two-thirds of students score below the 50th percentile on the state assessment, or below standard on the state writing test. Texas's Year 2000 goal for its education reform is to have 50 percent of students pass the state assessment. A few states, such as Colorado, Michigan and Nebraska, have policies that require schools to show change across the performance spectrum: students at all levels, from low to high-achieving, must show improvement. These kinds of state policies can provide explicit incentives to address teaching and learning needs of students furthest from meeting the standard.

States must address inequities in students' opportunities to learn (OTL). Ensuring that all students have comparable learning opportunities is perhaps the most politically challenging issue that states face. The courts have established the principle that a high-stakes graduation test should be a fair measure of what students are taught; students should receive adequate advanced notice and sufficient educational opportunities to prepare for the test.[34] This standard was easier to meet in the past when students were held accountable for mastering only basic skills. As high stakes assessments measure more rigorous content, students need access to teachers who have the content knowledge and pedagogy required to teach challenging content to a diverse group of learners. They need access to an academic program that addresses the standards. And they need access to supplemental help as they move through the system.

States must acknowledge and develop strategies to address academic gaps among their racial/ethnic groups. Maryland is an example of a state that has been proactive in acknowledging and addressing achievement disparities between minority and non-minority students. In 1997, the State Superintendent of Schools appointed an Advisory Council on Education That Is Multicultural (ETM) that reports on the scope of the minority achievement gap, issues recommendations, and monitors state action on these recommendations. After enacting a more rigorous high school graduation test, the State Board of Education directed the State Department of Education to develop a comprehensive state and local K-12 program of remediation to ensure that students have the assistance they need to meet the state's standards. Statewide working groups are focusing on student readiness, school climate and instructional quality, teacher readiness, and at-risk students. The state legislature has backed these efforts with increased funding of programs for students who are at-risk of not achieving at high standards.

[34] *Debra P. v. Turlington*, 644F.2d 397, 5th Cir. 1981.

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For more than forty years, the Council for Basic Education (CBE) has been an independent, critical voice for education reform. CBE's goal is to influence education in the United States through advocacy for high academic standards and the promotion of a strong liberal arts education for all children in the nation's elementary and secondary schools.

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